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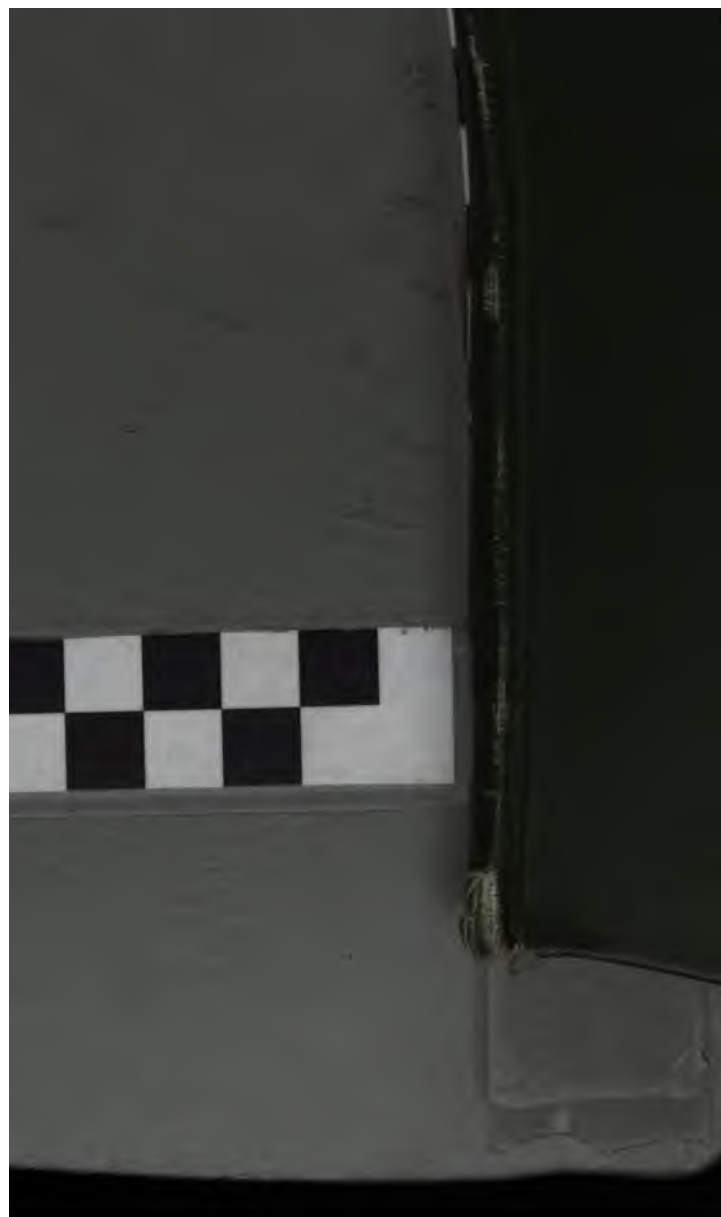
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1931



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AFTER-DINNER STORIES FROM BALZAC

DONE INTO ENGLISH BY MYNDART VERELST

With an Introduction

BY

EDGAR SALTUS

AUTHOR OF "THE PHILOSOPHY OF DISENCHANTMENT," ETC.

NEW YORK
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V. A. B.

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INTRODUCTION — BALZAC.



BALZAC.



INTRODUCTION.

IN one of the quietest streets of Brussels, within a stone's throw of flashy boulevards, there stands a house whose frontage is so quaintly Brabantine that the passer does not need to be an architect to halt before it, nor a dreamer to wonder what is going on inside. Like men and women, houses too have characters. Sometimes they are good, sometimes they are bad, often they are indifferent, but now and then the observer happens upon one that possesses a refreshing individuality of its own. This theory, which, while not quite so haggard as the Wandering Jew, is yet not one that the writer has any wish to represent as drawing its first breath, may still perhaps serve to bring into relief the idea whose conveyance is sought, and which is simply that the house alluded to has originality enough to excite the interest

of a tax-gatherer. Indeed, one may say without any attempt at the pictorial that it is precisely such a house as this that a follower in Hoffmann's footsteps would choose as the dwelling of a hero.

The street itself is a charming accessory. It has that suggestion of moss-grown tranquillity that the clatter of a sabot accentuates, and in wandering through it any imaginative loiterer might fancy himself in the mouldering avenue of a forgotten town. But to return to the point, or rather to the house. In it lives a gentleman and with him a memory and a library. The gentleman himself may be spared any personalities. The memory which he cultivates is that of Balzac, while the library contains very nearly everything that is in any way connected with the history and works of the French realist.

Curiously enough, Balzac hated the Belgians. He was wont to assert that through their piracy of his works he had been robbed of millions, and in a playfully indignant allusion to their misdeeds, he dubbed the first Leopold Counterfeit I. Nevertheless, it is to the capital of that monarch's kingdom that all believers now make their pilgrimage, and the library in the quiet street

is the one shrine and sanctuary that has been erected in Balzac's honor.

Regarding Balzac there has been of late much enthusiasm. Posterity, in her indolent way, has tried to make up for the neglect of earlier years ; there is a project dawdling along to give him a monument, and in Paris nowadays not a few men have become quasi-celebrities from the mere fact of having known him. But then, both as man and writer, Balzac is a figure well fashioned to excite admiration. He came in, as one may say, with a new *régime*, and out of the new *régime* he made a newer one for himself. The date of his appearance coincides with that of the victorious riot of the romantics.

At that time, or to speak more exactly, a little before that time, the French language was in such poverty that writers stammered through their phrases with the hesitancy of paralyzed old age. In the place of words to express thoughts there were a number of conventional prejudices that choked free utterance ; for that matter the direct mention of any ordinary object, such for instance as a handkerchief, would have denoted that the writer was ignorant of the delicacies of style and form. Then suddenly, with barely a

note of warning, a band of young enthusiasts swept down on the sleepy classicists, tossed their rules and rubbish to the winds, tore the modern melodrama from the breast of dead tragedy, breathed a new and wholesome life into an expiring dictionary, and invented rhymes that were millionaires in their opulence and heroic in their audacity. During this revolution, M. de Banville says that the world of literature was made up of two clans, romantics and imbeciles. To this it is permissible to take exception: Balzac was neither the one nor the other. The part he took in the fray was that of free lance. He fired many a shot at the enemy, but he fired them in the interest of his own cause, which had nothing whatever to do with gorgeous fictions and freedom in verse.

Baudelaire used to say that romanticism was the most recent expression of the Beautiful, and it is probable that, had the question been raised, he would have defined the school which Balzac was inaugurating as the most recent expression of the True. Parenthetically it may be noted that of late the Beautiful has gotten sadly bedraggled, while on the other hand the True seems to have been gaining in stronger and surer signifi-

cance. Contemporary readers have utterly refused to be interested in the mediæval bric-à-brac which the turbulency of 1830 unearthed. To them the effect of what was termed local color, and which seems to have been little more than a love of the historical heightened by a passion for sonorous adjectives, is about as entertaining as are the adventures of Harlequin and Columbine to one no longer a child. It is facts that are asked for now, and in France the more unpleasant they are the more palatable they seem to be.

The manufacture of fiction from facts was begun by Balzac. And here perhaps the distinction may be drawn between his school and that of later comers in adjoining fields. In realism there is both fact and suggestion, whereas in the decadent naturalism of to-day the reader is offered but facts alone. There is no dream, no beyond. In Balzac there is both and more besides. To be prolific, he used to say, one has but to study life. And it was from his study of life, and his knowledge of its inscrutable possibilities, that he built the structure which is known as the "*Comédie Humaine*."

The "*Comédie Humaine*" is not unlike a

wooded labyrinth. There are in it many tall and towering trees, not a few that have been stunted in their growth, while through it all is a great luxuriance of underbrush. On a first visit its expansive diffuseness is well-nigh disheartening. There is seemingly no highway across its tortuous divagations, and there does not seem to be so much as a beaten track. Certainly there are few finger-posts, and in attempting to grasp the fullness of the entire work the only plan is to circle it with a mental cordon and then beat through it to the centre.

When this has been successfully accomplished the result is highly satisfactory. The reader then finds himself in possession of a description of life and manners in France from the Restoration to the Coup d'État which is at once complex and unique. Balzac used to be very bitter about the historians of ancient monarchies. The baldness and aridity of their chronicles disgusted him. They gave no personal traits, no account of habits and customs, in short no anecdotes, and has not a wise man said that anecdotes are the best part of history?

This defect Balzac tried to remedy, or at least to do so, so far as lay in his power, and

with the "Comédie Humaine" he proposed to present posterity with a complete picture of French civilization in the first half of the present century. In this he partially succeeded, but in setting about the task, he had to overcome an obstacle which other historians did not even encounter. Where they chronicled successive facts he was obliged to describe a simultaneous action. To take for instance such an example as Suetonius. It was easy for him to tell of Cæsar, and when he came to the apotheosis to close the chapter, begin another about Augustus, and so on, through the list of emperors. But with Balzac it was different: the action, being simultaneous, was necessarily more or less intercalated, and it is for this reason that on a first visit the work seems unordered and confused, but, as it has been hinted, once circled the confusion gives way to order and each page is found related to others.

Trollope tried something of this kind, but on a much narrower and shallower scale. It has been said of him that he increased the number of our acquaintances without adding to our visiting lists, and, indeed, there are few of his characters that are not exceptionally well-bred, and pleasant to know. Even

when prosy, their prosiness is that which comes of uninterrupted good living; almost all of them are socially unobjectionable, and if his women share in common the same mild sense of what is proper, and seem fated to say the same things, who shall say that they are not refined and affectionate people?

When Balzac told of people of like ilk he made them a trifle more vivacious, but not a whit less refined. The Duchess of Omnium might have had her doubts about Madame de Beauséant, but we may be quite sure that she would have been glad to know Madame Firmiani. But with the men it is a different story. Trollope never knew a villain, or if he did he kept the fact to himself. His heroes are sometimes scampish, but they are seldom entirely forgetful of Mrs. Grundy. Mr. Burgo Fitzgerald, for instance, was certainly depraved, and his depravity is made very patent when he is found breakfasting off *curaçoa*, and *paté de foie-gras*: anything more suggestive than that would be hard to narrate to ears polite, and, consequently, Mr. Fitzgerald was the English novelist's chief representative of shameless dissipation.

In this lies Trollope's great charm. In

taking up one of his books the reader knows beforehand that he will meet only well-bred people, and that their vices, if they have any, will never be wantonly distressing. But as has been hinted, Trollope's plan, though fashioned after Balzac's, was yet much narrower. Where the one depicted a fraction of the higher classes of English society, the other took all humanity, or, to speak more exactly, all French humanity for his province, and analyzed each of its vices and virtues with microscopic eye. Then too, where Trollope introduces us to a number of people whom it is pleasant to know, but who seldom have the power to move us, Balzac makes his characters so thoroughly human that their vicissitudes, their triumphs and failures thrill the reader with an excited interest which the failures and triumphs of friends in the flesh and the blood are often unable to arouse.

It is this ability to make the reader grieve and exult that has given to Balzac the position which he holds to-day. Certainly he has other claims to fame, but these claims he does not hold alone. There are many moralists and many thinkers as clear-sighted as he, but it is a matter of general agree-

ment that in the delineation of character and the painting of scenery, Balzac has employed a realism such as no other writer has had the power to suggest.

In spite of this there are many people who have declared the "*Comédie Humaine*" to be indigestible. Perhaps it is, but then what about truffles? A publisher of Balzac's, Poulet-Malassis, the same who, led by a flamboyant fancy, took as trade-mark a chicken uncomfortably seated, refused to be disturbed by any such verdict as that. "Indigestible, is it?" he exclaimed with what, for a publisher, was rare good sense. "Well, I should hope so; who ever thinks of a dinner that is n't?"

Another objection to the "*Comédie Humaine*" is that there are too many weeds between the pavements, that it is too full of detail. But the details are so easy to skip! No one is forced to read them who does not want to, and they who do, enjoy them much in the same way as the amateurs who look at a Denner through a magnifying glass. At the same time it is not the writer's wish to represent the "*Comédie Humaine*" as impeccable nor its author as unsurpassed. Balzac never knew half so well as Gautier how dra-

pery should be handled ; he lacked the insolence of Dumas' gayety ; Baudelaire's ability to have an attack of nerves on paper was not possessed by him ; Hugo could plant adjectives in such a fashion that they exploded like bombs before his reader's eyes, and in this art Balzac was uninstructed. In none of these accomplishments was he adept, but he had something worth them all — solidity. What he built was constructed with a cement of his own invention. The cement is still obtainable, but the secret of its application died with him. *Demandez plutôt à Zola.*

Personally considered, Balzac was the antithesis of the typical Frenchman. He was pure in morals and sincerely religious. A few months before he died he wrote to his mother in reference to the Countess Hanska, a Polish widow of great beauty and wealth : "Three days ago I married the only woman I have ever loved, whom I love more than ever, and whom I shall love until death. I believe that this union is the recompense that God has held in reserve for me through so many difficulties suffered and overcome."

When a man expresses himself in such

a manner it is not easy to accuse him of atheism and immorality, yet, through the innate perversity of the superficial, Balzac has been arraigned for both. The reason is not hard to find. Balzac was an innovator, and when has an innovator been well received? The number of people who regard a new idea or a fresh theory as a personal insult is curiously large; indeed they are more frequent to-day than when Socrates quaffed the hemlock. As an innovator, therefore, Balzac was necessarily attacked; he was called a literary filibuster, and because some of his characters were depraved and others irreligious, it was asserted that their negations and vices were the simulacra of his own thought. Sainte-Beuve wrote him down with something of the pride of a eunuch whose heel is on his sultan's throat. Other critics swelled the chorus. But for this abuse he cared very little, except so far as it enhanced the market value of his wares. He was fond of saying that mediocrity may be praised but it is never discussed. When, therefore, he found himself the object of polemics, he made no direct reply, and contented himself with putting up the price of his manuscripts. This,

of course, was highly philosophic, and in the end his detractors were silenced, but meanwhile their voices were so loud and so vibrant, that even to-day there are many who look upon Balzac as a Sade and a Holbach rolled into one.

Balzac produced slowly and in a manner which was peculiar to himself. A plot was nothing to him, and scenes were details, but in the passage from brain to paper his thought continually halted in a search of the term that would best express his meaning. When he had thoroughly considered the subject which he proposed to treat, and collected all available data, he would shut himself up for months at a time and work from twelve to twenty-one hours a day. After much labor spent in the effort to keep execution on a par with conception, and hours lost in the torturing pursuit of an adjective, he would manage to cover thirty or forty sheets with an outline of ideas and phrases. These he sent to his publisher, who, by agreement, returned them narrowly printed on large placards.

The work, freed in this way from any personality, and its errors at once apparent, was then corrected and strengthened. As the

present writer has elsewhere explained,¹ the forty pages grew, on a second reading, to a hundred, two hundred on a third, while on the proof-sheets themselves new lines would start from the beginning, the middle, or the end of a phrase, and if the margins were insufficient, other sheets of paper were pinned or glued to the placards, which were again and again returned, corrected, and reprinted until at last the work was satisfactorily completed.

This little eccentricity was not one that could be indulged in without expense. From the sum which he was paid for his work a deduction was usually made for type corrections. In one instance this deduction not only swallowed the whole sum which he was to receive, but left him in debt besides.

Now Balzac was not rich. His life was a struggle with want and a combat with the public. In the end he throttled the one and conquered the other, but the long conflict shattered his nerves, and when at last fame and riches came, so too did death. From the day when, a mere boy, he left his father's house, up to within less than a year of his death, in fact for a period that ex-

¹ *Balzac*. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston.

tended over thirty years, he was ceaselessly engaged in battle-axing difficulties.

In place of a guard of honor he had a *cortège* of creditors; his debts were not large but they were many, and Balzac, who was not a man to let anything go to waste, eyed them uneasily for a while and then turned them into capital. Secretly he envied Dumas, not for the work he did, nor for its quality, but for the sums that he received for it, and for his consequent and immense prodigality. To outdo him, therefore, Balzac represented that his debts were something fabulous; that he owed millions; that had he the Bank of England in one hand and the Bank of France in the other, their united coffers would be insufficient to pay his creditors. The stratagem, if petty, was none the less successful, and Balzac was as much admired for the money he owed as Dumas was for the money he spent.

The French Academy, meanwhile, which had accepted Alfred de Musset, not because he was a poet but because he was a man about town, blackballed Balzac on account of these self-same debts. In the end they were paid, and had he lived longer the Academy might have reconsidered its de-

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cision. Yet then again it might not have. Gautier had a theory to the effect that to be a member of the Academy was simply and solely a matter of predestination. "There is no need to do anything," he would say, "and so far as the writing of books is concerned, that is entirely useless. A man is born an Academician as he is born a bishop or a cook. He can abuse the Academy in a dozen pamphlets, if it amuses him, and be elected all the same; but if he is not predestined, three hundred volumes and ten masterpieces, recognized as such by the genuflections of an adoring universe, and even by the Academy itself, will not aid him to open its doors." Evidently Balzac was not predestined, but then neither was Molière, and there must have been some consolation for him in that.

In spite of his debts Balzac spent but little time in Bohemia. He did not have so much as a bowing acquaintance with Mussette. Mimi Pinson knew him not, and that lady who was so dainty that she took an omnibus whenever she went out, did not number him among her conquests. Certain of his heroes, freshly arrived from the provinces, gravitated toward the penniless indo-

lence of that fantastic land which Murger called the preface to the Academy, the hospital or the morgue, but the spell was momentary. Balzac made them work for a living. The purple and fine underclothing with which Gautier garmented his heroes was not bestowed on them. More than this, they were all too young to have read the "Chansons des rues et des bois" and the alluring maxim, —

Être riche n'est pas l'affaire,
Toute l'affaire est de charmer, —

had left them uncorrupted. Oh! they were willing enough to charm, and exceptionally well built for that occupation, but their great effort was to fill their pockets. In this they generally succeeded, but as the filling of pockets is a feat never accomplished in Bohemia, Balzac has given his readers but a vague geography of it.

There is another reason for this omission. In his quality of realist Balzac never described a place which he had not visited. Now Bohemia is the easiest place in the world to go to, but it is one for which but few return tickets are issued. Murger himself never got one. Early in life, Petrus Borel, the *rex poetæ minores*, — and the

reader is enjoined not to let any one persuade him that the title is insignificant, — Petrus Borel lost his way there. Gautier, who went everywhere, even to church, made a rapid incursion to this Arcadia of chimeras, and came back with a dozen or more jars of local color in his luggage. But Gautier was the ideal pantheist. He loved lanes better than mansards. Among other travelers was Jules Vabre, a youth of singular promise which Bohemia gave him no time to fulfill. Of him nothing survived except the plaintive title of the unwritten essay on "The Incommodity of Commodities."

In the face of dangers such as these Balzac hesitated, if at all, only for a moment. He had many a chase after that coyest of game, the coin of the realm, and the hunt often carried him very near the frontiers; but once the quarry bagged, he gave a wide berth to taverns where the paradoxes were so lurid that waiters in the flush of manhood were reduced to idiocy, and, plunging into the abysses of reflection, cogitated on the most intricate of all problems — how in a given time to turn a ream of paper, a bottle of ink and a bundle of quills into a bag of gold weighing ten thousand francs — and solved it! But not at once.

Genius does not fall from the skies in evening dress. The gardenia that is to adorn its button-hole is a flower whose growth is proportioned to its longevity. It took Balzac ten years to form a style that suited him, and almost as many more to form another that pleased the public. And yet there are people who think that literature is an easy trade! "To live by the pen," Balzac said, "is a labor that galley-slaves would refuse. They would prefer death. To live by the pen consists in creating, creating to-day, to-morrow, forever, or to appear to, and the appearance is as hard as the reality." Nevertheless he continued to create, not with the rapidity of Dumas, nor with the magnificence of Hugo, but with the continuous effort of the tortoise that distances the hare in the end.

There is an aphorism which was as current thirty years ago as it is to-day, to the effect that there is nothing new under the sun. A statement such as this, which to ninety and nine people out of a hundred is an article of belief, is rarely taken by the thinker to be an echo of the voice of God. To him the *vox populi* is not unfrequently the *vox stulti*. One day, therefore, when this

phrase was more than usually insistent, Balzac revolted. "Nothing new under the sun? *allons donc!* what about interesting virtue?" That day he wrote "Madame Firmiani," which pleased him so well that soon after he wrote "Eugénie Grandet." This latter story contributed as much as anything to make him famous. Somewhat to his disgust, however, his authorship was given him as a title. "Why do they speak of me as the author of 'Eugénie Grandet'?" he would ask. "Does no one ever read 'Madame Firmiani'?" A great many did read "Madame Firmiani," and all who did so liked it. But "Eugénie Grandet" is much longer: it is the real novel, or rather the model of what the real novel should be, while "Madame Firmiani" is merely an episode, a sketch which is as pure as it is delightful; an after-dinner story in fact, but one perhaps best told *en tête-à-tête*.

Another work which added greatly to Balzac's reputation is "Le Père Goriot." In this novel, Rastignac, a character well known to all of Balzac's readers, is introduced to Parisian life. This fascinating young scoundrel rioted through the "Comédie Humaine" with such *disinvoltura* that traces

of him are everywhere discoverable. He was cousin to Madame de Beauséant, the recital of whose adventures constitutes one of the accompanying translations, and he is so narrowly connected with the climax in another of them that a brief biography will not, perhaps, be found amiss. In "The Red Inn" it is related that Taillefer's son was killed in a duel, whereupon he acknowledged a daughter whom he had previously refused to have anything to do with. Now Mlle. Taillefer once lodged in the Pension Vauquer, a boarding-house where Rastignac also lived. Rastignac was poor, Mlle. Taillefer was known to be the daughter of a rich man. Rastignac, though poor, was good-looking, and Mlle. Taillefer, though unhappy, was susceptible. Another lodger, Vautrin, the Machiavelli of the galleys, noting these facts, approached Rastignac and addressed him somewhat as follows: "I will have Mlle. Taillefer's brother killed in a duel. Her father will then recognize her. She loves you: marry her, and we will share the dower." Rastignac refused, but not before the brother was killed. Taillefer thereupon becomes reconciled with his daughter, and both reappear in the story of "The Red

Inn." Finally, the story of "The 'Grande Bretèche,' "—in the core of which will be found a hitherto unimagined shudder,—is told by Bianchon, a young physician, with whom Rastignac was on terms of intimacy.

Readers to whom Rastignac has been something more than a fiction will doubtless be interested in knowing that he recently died, millionaire and peer of France. A personal friend of Balzac's, M. Albéric Second, the well-known author, is the writer's authority for this statement.

These four stories, which are now for the first time presented to English readers, have been selected from others of equal value, first, because their connection with the hubbub of the "Comédie Humaine" is but slight: second, because there is little if anything in them which could offend the American matron, or, for that matter, even her British cousin. Any special praise of them is unnecessary. They have been received with warm welcome in other lands and other tongues, and it is only fair to suppose that they will not go a-begging now.

EDGAR SALTUS.

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THE RED INN.

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THE RED INN.

SOME time ago a Paris banker, whose commercial relations with Germany were widespread, gave a dinner to one of those acquaintances that business men make here and there through correspondence.

This particular acquaintance, the senior partner of an important firm in Nuremberg, was a fat, good-natured German, a man of taste and erudition, and one who was very devoted to his pipe. His face was broad, his forehead high and square; his hair was light and scattered, his laugh unaffected; he was a good listener and also a good drinker; for that matter he seemed as fond of champagne as Johannisberg: in brief, he was the typical child of that pure and noble country where honest men are frequent and whose simplicity seven invasions have left undisturbed.

As is the case with all other Germans

that French writers have introduced, his name was Hermann. When he took his seat at table he did so with the air of a man to whom nothing is unimportant. After that he ate with the Tudesque appetite which has become famous in Europe, and bade thereby as best he might a conscientious farewell to the dishes and sauces of the great Carême.

To do him honor, his host had invited several capitalists, and with them a few pretty women whose amiability was in thorough harmony with Bavarian frankness. If, as I did, you could have seen that reunion of men who had drawn in their commercial claws that they might the better speculate on the pleasures of life, you would not have had such a poor opinion of usurious discounts. Man cannot be doing wrong all the time. Even among pirates there must be hours as fair as June roses.

“Before going away I hope M. Hermann will tell us a story, a German story, one that will frighten us all to death.”

These words were uttered at dessert by a pale young girl who looked as though she read Hoffmann and was familiar with Walter Scott. She was the banker's only daugh-

ter, and exceedingly beautiful. Her education was being completed at the theatre, and her predilection for melodramas was marked. At that moment the guests one and all were in that happy frame of mind which a good dinner invariably induces, particularly when the digestive powers have not been imposed on. When this stage of a dinner is reached, there are people who torment a peach pit, others who roll and fumble a crumb of bread; the sentimental trace vague letters with the stem of an apple, while the avaricious count their nutshells and arrange them on their plate in much the same manner that a playwright places the supernumeraries at the back of the stage. These are the little gastronomic felicities that Brillat-Savarin, with all his knowledge, omitted to note.

The table then was like a ship after a combat, in utter disorder and disarray. A few of the guests were idly gazing at the Swiss views that hung symmetrically against the walls, but no one was bored. The man who is bored during the digestion of a good dinner is yet to be met with. At such a time every one appreciates that pervasive calm which is the happy medium between the reverie of the thinker and the satisfac-

tion of the ruminant. Delighted with the idea of listening to anything, however uninteresting it might be, the guests turned therefore with one accord to the German. During that blessed intermission the voice of the story-teller is music to the senses. It heightens their negative pleasure.

Meanwhile, being naturally fond of pictures, I was looking admiringly at the smiling faces of the guests, when suddenly my attention was attracted by the appearance of the man who sat opposite to me. He was of medium height, somewhat stout, and he had the commonplace air of a broker. I had barely noticed him before, but now that I did so, his face, shadowed doubtless in the uncertain light, seemed earthy, and furrowed by violet tints. He was so cadaverous that any one might have thought he was in the last agonies. Motionless as a figure in a diorama, his dull eyes were fixed on the glittering facets of a crystal stopper, but I am convinced he did not see them. He seemed lost in some fantastic contemplation of the past and future. After I had looked at him for a moment or two I was in doubt whether he was drunk or in pain. "Can the fall in stocks have ruined him," I wondered, "or is he making plans to cheat his creditors?"

"Look," I said to the lady who sat next to me, "is n't that a bankrupt in the bud?"

"Nonsense," she answered, "he will be gay enough in a moment." Then, with a gracious gesture, she added, "There is no fear of his failing: he is worth a million at least; he is an old army contractor, and in his way not half a bad fellow. He married twice, the second time for money, and made his wife very happy. He has a pretty daughter whom he would n't acknowledge for some time, but finally his son was killed in a duel and he was forced to do so. He had no other child, you see. In that way, all of a sudden, his daughter became one of the greatest heiresses in Paris. His son's death was a hard blow, and every now and then he gets moody over it."

At that moment his eyes met mine. His look was so sombre and pensive that I shuddered. It was a look that held the history of a lifetime. Immediately the expression of his face became brighter. He took the crystal stopper, placed it mechanically in a decanter which stood filled with water before him, and turned with a smile to M. Hermann.

"He has n't two ideas in his head," I

told myself ; “ he thinks of nothing, except perhaps of his dinner.”

Frankly, I was disgusted at having exerted my powers of divination *in animâ vili* of a thick-headed financier. While I had been uselessly engaged in making these phrenological observations, the German had refreshed his nose with a pinch of snuff and begun his story. It would be difficult for me to reproduce it in the same terms which he employed, consequently I have written it out in my own way, leaving the mistakes to the Bavarian, and serving up the best of it with the candor of writers who forget to put “ Translated from the German ” on their title-pages.

THEORY AND PRACTICE.

“ Toward the close of Vendémiaire, year VII, a republican date which corresponds to the 20th October, 1799, two young men who had set out from Bonn in the morning arrived at nightfall at Andernach, a little town on the left bank of the Rhine, a few miles from Coblentz.

“ At that time the French army, under the command of General Augereau, was manœuvring in presence of the Austrians, who oc-

cupied the right bank of the river. The headquarters of the republican division was at Coblenz, and one of the brigades that Augereau commanded was encamped at Andernach.

“The two travelers were Frenchmen. Their blue uniforms, shot with white and bordered with red velvet, their swords, and particularly their tricolor plumes were sufficient to indicate even to German peasants that they were military surgeons; a class of men, by the way, who were well liked in the army as well as in the countries which our troops invaded. Well-educated, able, and peaceful, they did what good they could and relieved much of the suffering that the cruelty of the republic caused.

“The two young men alluded to were each provided with a passport and commission signed by Coste and Bernadotte. They were then on their way to join the brigade to which they had been attached. Both belonged to middle-class families of Beauvais, a place where there is little wealth, but where the principles of morality and loyalty are transmitted as part of an inheritance. Led by that curiosity which is natural to youth, they had arrived at the scene of war

before the time which had been set for them to begin their duties. Maternal prudence had allowed them but a small sum, yet with the few louis they possessed they did not consider themselves poor, for paper then was so depreciated that a handful of gold represented a great deal of money. Neither of them was over twenty, and both were enthusiastic. Thus far they had journeyed like artists, philosophers and observers. From time to time the roads over which they passed led them to the summit of a hill, where, through an opening in the forest or some favoring accident, they caught a glimpse of the Rhine, framed in sandstone and festooned with luxuriant vegetation. The valleys, the by-paths and hedges exhaled that scent of autumn that makes the traveler dream; the tops of the trees had begun to take on the warm brown tints that are the signs of age; here and there the leaves had fallen, but the sky was still deep blue, and the dry roads stretched out afar like yellow lines.

“ When within half a league of Andernach the two friends rode along through a silence as deep as though the country was unvisited by the clamor of war. Their path led them

for some little time along the granite walls that skirt the Rhine, until, through an abrupt descent, it took them down into the valley where the town lies on the river's bank. So soon as the colored roofs of Andernach were in sight, one of the young men, whose name was Prosper Magnan, called the attention of his companion to the beauties of the view, and pointed admiringly to the boats rocking in the river, the gardens, the gables, the outer stairways, and to the galleries that circled about a thousand quaint and homelike dwellings."

At the moment when M. Hermann pronounced the name of Prosper Magnan, the man who sat opposite to me seized the decanter, poured out a glass of water and swallowed it at a gulp. This incident attracted my attention. It certainly seemed to me that his hand trembled and that the perspiration started to his forehead.

"What is his name?" I asked my neighbor.

"Taillefer," she answered.

"Are you ill?" I asked, turning to him, for I saw that he had grown very pale.

"Not in the least," he replied, with a little bow of thanks. "I am listening," he

added, turning to the others who were looking at him.

"The name of the other young man," M. Hermann went on to say, "has escaped me, but I remember that Prosper Magnan told me he was dark and slender. For the sake of clarity, I will, however, with your permission, call him Wilhelm."

In this way, with a serene disregard of romanticism and local color, the Bavarian baptized the French surgeon with a German name, and placidly continued his story.

"By the time the two young men reached Andernach it was quite dark, too late in fact to make it worth their while to hunt up their chiefs, and try to get billeted in a town already packed with soldiers. They resolved therefore to pass their last night of freedom in an inn situated on the outskirts of the town, whose rich colors, glowing in the setting sun, had attracted their notice from afar. Painted in red from cellar to garret, this inn, either because it was separated from the other houses, or because of the contrast between its hue and the surrounding green of the vegetation, had given a very pretty effect to the entire landscape. Its name it owed to the exterior decoration

which a commercial superstition had preserved unchanged from the immemorial days when it was first established.

“The noise of the horses brought the host of the Red Inn to the door.

“‘A little later, gentlemen,’ he cried, ‘and you would have had to sleep in the starlight, like the better part of your compatriots yonder. Everything is taken here; if you want a bed I have only my own to offer you. The horses can have a spread of straw in the court-yard; my stable to-day is filled with Christians. Do you come from France?’ he asked, after a slight pause.

“‘From Bonn,’ Prosper answered, ‘and what is more, we have n’t eaten anything since this morning.’

“‘Oh, there is plenty of food: you need n’t worry about that. People come here from all over the country to give wedding parties. You shall have a dish fit for a prince, a Rhine carp; there is nothing finer.’

“When the innkeeper, after calling in vain for an ostler, had taken the tired horses in charge, the young men entered the principal room. The thick white clouds produced by a number of smokers prevented them at first from distinguishing the people who were

present, but when they had found a seat at a table, and had looked around with the practical patience of philosophic travelers who know any fuss to be useless, they gradually made out the ordinary accessories of a German hostelry, — the stove, the clock, the beer mugs, the long pipes surged before them through drifts of smoke. Here and there were the heteroclite heads of Jews and Teutons, and among them the bronzed faces of watermen. The epaulettes of French officers glittered through the fog, and there was a clanking of swords and spurs on the floor. Some of the guests were playing cards, others argued, kept silence, ate, drank, or walked up and down. A stout little woman in a black velvet cap, with the blue and silver stomacher, the cushion, the bunch of keys, the silver clasp, braided hair— in short, with all the distinctive marks of the German landlady that engravings have made familiar to every one, bustled about and made the two friends patient and impatient with remarkable and impartial cleverness.

“ Little by little the hubbub subsided, the guests withdrew and the clouds of smoke disappeared. When the table was set and the classic carp was served, the clock struck

eleven and the room was empty. Through the silence of the night the horses could be heard in the court-yard, as also the murmur of the Rhine, and the indefinable clamors that at night animate a crowded inn. Doors and windows were opened and closed ; there was a vague sound of voices echoing through the halls.

“ At this moment of silence and tumult, the two Frenchmen and their host, — who was boasting about Andernach, the supper, the Rhine wine, the Republican army, and his wife, — heard the hoarse cries of watermen and the creaking of a boat against the shore. The innkeeper, evidently familiar with the guttural interrogations of the boatmen, hastily left the room and as quickly returned, bringing with him a short, stout man, and followed by two sailors carrying a valise and a few boxes. The boxes were placed on the floor, but the valise the new-comer took charge of himself. ‘ You had better sleep on the boat,’ he said to the sailors, and then unceremoniously sat himself down at the table where the two Frenchmen were eating their supper.

“ The innkeeper pointed to the fish. ‘ That is all I have left,’ he said, ‘ I have n’t a crust or a bone.’

“‘No sauerkraut?’ the stout man asked.

“‘Not enough to put in my wife’s thimble, and as I told you, there is no other bed for you than the chair on which you are sitting, and no other room than the one you are in.’

“At these words the new-comer cast at the room, the innkeeper, and the two Frenchmen a look in which prudence and fright were equally mingled.

“I ought to tell you at this point,” M. Hermann said, “that the real name and antecedents of this individual were never discovered. From papers which he had with him it was learned that he came from Aix-la-Chapelle, that he had assumed the name of Walhenfer, and that he had a large pin manufactory near Neuweid. He wore a coat of common cloth, knee-breeches, a waistcoat of dark green velvet, high boots and a leather belt. His face was round, his manners frank and cordial, but during that evening it was evident that he was trying to disguise something which was either fear or anxiety. The opinion of the innkeeper has always been that he was running away from his creditors. Later I learned that his manufactory had been burned down through one of those accidents so common in war time. In spite of

his worried appearance he seemed very good-natured, he was not bad-looking, and the whiteness of his neck was so heightened by a black cravat that Wilhelm joked about it to Prosper."

Here M. Taillefer drank a glass of water.

"Prosper courteously invited him to share the supper, an offer which he at once accepted. He put the valise under his feet and took off his hat, his gloves, and the two pistols which he wore in his belt. The innkeeper having brought another plate, all three then silently began to satisfy their appetites. The room was so close and there were so many flies that Prosper begged the innkeeper to open the window. The window was barricaded by bars of iron that stretched from one side of the wainscot to the other, and to which, for greater security, the shutters were attached by means of screws. As chance would have it, Prosper noticed the manner in which the innkeeper took the bars off before the window could be opened.

"But," continued M. Hermann, "I ought not to tell you about the window alone: the entire arrangement of the inn should be explained, as otherwise it would be difficult to follow the thread of the story. The room

where the people were of whom I speak had two exits ; one opened on the road to Andernach, which bordered the Rhine. There, in front of the inn, was a little dock to which the boat that had brought Walhenfer was moored. The other door opened on the court-yard. This court-yard, surrounded by high walls, was filled with horses and cattle.

“ When the innkeeper opened the window, he carefully bolted and barred the door which opened on the road. The innkeeper’s room, where the two Frenchmen were to sleep, was next to the one in which they were taking their supper, and it was separated only by a partition from the kitchen where the innkeeper and his wife were to pass the night. It is easy therefore to understand that the dining-room, the innkeeper’s room and the kitchen were, in a measure, cut off from the rest of the house. In the court-yard were two watch - dogs. The way in which they barked showed that both were irritable and vigilant.

“ ‘ What a beautiful night ! ’ Wilhelm exclaimed, as he looked out at the sky. There was then no noise to be heard except the murmur of the Rhine.

“ ‘ Gentlemen,’ said Walhenfer, ‘ let me or-

der a few bottles of wine to wash down the carp. I see that like myself you have had a long journey to-day. In drinking we will forget our fatigue.'

"This proposition was at once accepted, and the innkeeper went out through the kitchen door to the cellar where the wine was stored. When he reappeared with five venerable-looking bottles, his wife, who had been serving the supper, looked carefully about, and, sure of having forestalled all possible exigencies, went back to the kitchen, and a little later was heard snoring in a manner that made them all smile.

"Toward midnight, when nothing remained on the table except some biscuits, some cheese, and some good old wine, they one and all — for the innkeeper had been invited to drink with them — became very communicative, particularly the young Frenchmen, who chatted about their home, their studies and the war. Prosper Magnan brought tears to the eyes of the fugitive when with Picardian candor and *naïveté* he tried to imagine what his mother was doing while he, her son, was on the banks of the Rhine.

"‘I can see her now, repeating her evening prayer,’ he said, ‘she does n’t forget me

in it, I know, and I am sure she wonders where I am. If she has won a few sous from her neighbor — from your mother, perhaps,' he added, with a nudge at Wilhelm's elbow — 'she will put them in the big red jar where she keeps her savings, for she is trying to save enough money to buy the thirty acres that she wants at Lescheville. Those thirty acres are worth every sou of sixty thousand francs. They are beautiful fields. I tell you what, if I had them, I'd live at Lescheville for the rest of my life and ask nothing better. How my father longed for them! Well, he died without them. I have played on them a hundred times.'

" 'Have n't you your *hoc erat in votis* too, M. Walhenfer?' Wilhelm asked.

" 'Yes, yes, indeed, it came of itself, and now' — he hesitated and left the sentence unfinished.

" 'I,' said the innkeeper, whose face had gotten rather red, 'I bought a vineyard the other day that I had wanted for ten years.'

"In this way, after the manner of men whose tongues have been loosened by wine, they kept on talking, developing for each other that transient friendship so common

among travelers, until, at last, when they were about to separate, Wilhelm offered his bed to the stranger.

“‘You might just as well take it,’ he said, ‘for I can sleep with Prosper. It won’t be the first time, certainly, nor the last; besides, you are our elder, and it is for youth to honor age.’

“‘Bah!’ exclaimed the innkeeper, ‘there are several mattresses on my wife’s bed. I’ll give you one and you can put it on the floor.’

“‘Thank you,’ Walhenfer answered, ‘I shall be glad to do so.’ Then, turning to the two friends, he added in a lower tone, ‘I must admit that I hoped you would make the offer. I don’t like the looks of my boatmen, and I shall not be sorry to pass the night in the company of two fine fellows, and French soldiers at that! In this valise I have a hundred thousand francs in gold and diamonds.’

“The unaffected manner with which this imprudent confession was received redoubled the German’s confidence. The innkeeper helped his guests to arrange their beds, and when everything was in order he wished them good - night and withdrew.

Walhenfer and the two Frenchmen jested about the pillows. Prosper took his box of instruments, with that of Wilhelm's, and put them both under the mattress, that they might supply the place of a bolster. For greater security, Walhenfer did the same with his valise.

"We shall both sleep on our capital," Prosper said, 'you on your gold, I on my instruments. I wonder if mine will ever represent as much as yours?'

"You have only to be patient,' Walhenfer answered, 'in the end, work and honesty are always successful.'

"In a short time Walhenfer and Wilhelm were sound asleep, but Prosper, either from over-fatigue or indisposition, remained awake. Unconsciously his thoughts took an evil turn. The hundred thousand francs danced before him. To him such a sum was an enormous fortune: with it he began to build a number of those castles that occupy us in the moments that precede sleep, in those moments when confused figures surge before us and thought acquires a magic power. His mother's wishes were all gratified. The thirty acres of land were his. He married a young lady whose wealth hitherto had been

an obstacle to their union. With the aid of the hundred thousand francs he planned a life of ease and happiness ; he saw himself the father of a family, rich, respected and perhaps mayor of Beauvais. His Picardian imagination caught fire and he tried to think how he could change his fictions into facts. In every way he endeavored to plan a crime in theory. He pictured Walhenfer dead ; he saw the glitter of the gold and diamonds ; their brilliance dazzled him ; his heart thrilled within him ; morally he was then a criminal. Fascinated by the gold, he intoxicated himself with arguments. He asked himself whether the poor fellow had really any need to live and tried to fancy that he had never existed. The whole thing could be managed so easily ! Across the Rhine were the Austrians, at the door of the inn was a boat and boatmen, he could cut the man's throat, throw him into the river, take the valise, jump out of the window, pay the boatmen and escape into Austria. He went so far as to calculate whether, with his knowledge of surgery, he could cut his victim's throat before he had a chance to scream."

At this point M. Taillefer mopped his forehead and drank some water.

“Slowly and noiselessly he got out of bed, dressed himself and entered the room where he had eaten his supper. Then, with that fatal intelligence that man finds suddenly within him, with that power of tact and will which criminals and prisoners never lack in the accomplishment of their projects, he unscrewed the iron bars, placed them noiselessly on the floor, and, leaning heavily against the shutters, opened them in such wise as to deaden their creaking.

“The moon threw her pale rays on the scene, and enabled him to dimly distinguish the objects in the room where his companions were sleeping. The palpitations of his heart were so loud, so deep and sonorous that they frightened him: he was afraid of losing his presence of mind; his hands trembled; the soles of his feet seemed to be resting on burning coals; but still the execution of his plan had thus far been managed so well that he felt as though predestined to complete it.

“When he reached Walhenfer’s bed, he mechanically recommended himself to God, but, at the very moment when, collecting all his strength, he raised his arm, he caught the whisper of an interior voice, a light

came to his eyes, and throwing the instrument on his own bed, he ran into the other room. There he conceived such a profound horror of himself, and yet felt so weak, and so afraid that he might again succumb to the fascination which had made him its prey, that he sprang out of the window and walked up and down like a sentinel before the inn. At times his precipitate march took him to Andernach; at others it brought him to the slope which he had descended before reaching the inn; but the silence of the night was so profound, he had such confidence in the watch-dogs, that he not unfrequently lost sight of the window which he had left open. He tried to tire himself so that he would sleep. But as he walked on under the cloudless sky, admiring the countless stars, and affected perhaps by the pure air and the melancholy wash of the waves, he fell into a reverie which little by little brought his thoughts back to their normal condition. In the end, his natural good sense dissipated all traces of his momentary frenzy. His education, his religious sentiments, and particularly, he told me, the recollection of the peaceful days that he had passed at home, triumphed over his evil inclinations.

“On his return to the inn, after a long meditation, — to the charm of which he had thoroughly abandoned himself, — he told me that he could not only have slept, — he could have stood guard over a million. At the moment when his honesty rose restrengthened from the struggle, his happiness was so great that, kneeling down, he thanked God for his goodness. In fact, he was as thoroughly content as on the day of his first communion, when he felt himself worthy of the angels, because he had passed the entire day without sinning, in word, deed or thought. He returned to the inn, shut the window, without taking any precautions against making a noise, and went at once to bed. His weariness, both mental and physical, was so great that he had barely laid down before he fell into that fantastic somnolence which precedes deep sleep. The senses then grow dull, consciousness gradually fades, thoughts are incomplete and the last tremors of the mind simulate a form of revery.

“‘How heavy the air is,’ Prosper murmured to himself, ‘I seem to be breathing a damp vapor.’ This effect he vaguely accounted for by the difference existing be-

tween the atmosphere of the room and the pure air of the country. Soon he heard a sound similar to that made by the dripping of water. His first impulse then was to arouse Wilhelm and Walhenfer. Unfortunately, however, he remembered the wooden clock, and, thinking that he recognized the movement of the pendulum, fell asleep with that indistinct and confused perception."

"Do you want some water, M. Taillefer?" the host asked, seeing the capitalist mechanically grasp the decanter.

It was empty !

After the momentary pause occasioned by this incident, M. Hermann continued his story.

"The next morning Prosper Magnan was awakened by a loud noise. It seemed to him as though he had heard piercing shrieks, and he experienced that violent shudder of the nerves which invariably occurs when we finish, on awaking, a painful sensation begun before sleep. The start to which we are then subjected is a psychological phenomenon as yet insufficiently observed. The spasm, caused doubtless by the sudden union of our two natures that have been separated during sleep, is usually very brief. But in

Prosper Magnan's case it persisted a moment and then, abruptly increasing, caused the most hideous sensation when, between his mattress and Walhenfer's, he saw a great pool of blood. The head of the German had rolled to the floor; his body was still on the bed. The blood had come from the neck.

"On seeing the eyes still open, yet fixed, on finding his sheets and even his hands spotted with gore, and on recognizing his own knife on the bed, Prosper Magnan fainted and fell over into the pool of blood. When he recovered consciousness, he found himself in the adjoining room, sitting on a chair, and surrounded by French soldiers. The room was filled with people. He gazed stupidly at an officer engaged in taking testimony. He noticed the innkeeper and his wife and the two boatmen. The instrument which the assassin had used " —

At this point, M. Taillefer coughed, drew out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead again. This action on his part, in which there was nothing unnatural, was only noticed by me; the other guests, who were all greatly interested in the story, were listening intently to M. Hermann. Taillefer

leaned his elbow on the table and looked straight at him. After that he made no further movement, but his face remained pale and pensive as at the moment when he toyed with the crystal stopper.

“The instrument which the assassin had used was on the table, and with it Prosper’s case, pocket-book and papers. Those present looked alternately at these things, and then at the young man, whose blurred eyes seemed sightless. From without came the sound of the voices of the crowd that had been attracted by the news of the crime. Through the tumult could be heard the tread of sentinels, and the thud of their muskets.

“The inn itself was closed, and the courtyard was empty and silent. Unable to sustain the gaze of the officer who was taking testimony, Prosper Magnan felt some one grasp his hand, and, raising his eyes, recognized by the uniform the surgeon-major of the Andernach brigade. The look which the man gave him was so piercingly severe that the young fellow shuddered and let his head fall on the back of his chair. A soldier held some vinegar to his face and he soon recovered, but his eyes were so woe-begone and lifeless that the surgeon, after feeling his

pulse, told the officer that it would be impossible to question him in his present condition. The captain motioned to a corporal. 'Very good,' he said to the surgeon, 'take him away.'

"'You infernal coward!' the corporal muttered, 'walk like a man, will you, before these Germans? Can't you remember who you are?'

"Prosper was aroused at this. He stood up and made a step or two, but when the door opened, and he saw the crowd outside, his knees trembled, and he staggered. Two soldiers then supported him on either side.

"'Cursed blackguard!' said one, 'shooting is too good for you.'

"'Get along, will you?' cried the other.

"'Look at him! look at him! Oh, the coward! the coward!' It seemed as though these words were uttered by but one voice, the tumultuous voice of the crowd that followed with noisy insults and increased at every step. During the passage from the inn to the prison, the uproar of the people, the tramp of the soldiers, the fair sky, the freshness of the air, the appearance of Andernach, the shimmering of the Rhine — all these things came to the young man with a

vagueness and dull confusion that had marked all his sensations since he awoke. There were moments, he told me, when it seemed as though he were dead. At that time," M. Hermann interrupted himself to say, "I was in prison. Like every one else at twenty, I was very enthusiastic; I burned to defend my country, and I had organized, in the neighborhood of Andernach, a volunteer company which I commanded. I was taken prisoner, however, and thrown into jail. It was ordered that I should be shot. They wanted to make an example of me that would frighten other insurgents. But my father managed to obtain a respite of three days, and meanwhile begged General Augereau to pardon me, which he subsequently did. I was present, therefore, when Prosper Magnan entered the prison, and I can assure you that I felt very sorry for him. Although he was weak, pale, and covered with blood, yet his face had such a stamp of candor and honesty that I was struck by it. It seemed to me as though Germany had breathed in his blue eyes and long, fair hair. He was like an image of my defeated country, and I took him not for a murderer but a victim. As he passed under my window he smiled in

that melancholy way which is common to the insane that have glimpses of their lost reason. Certainly his smile was not that of an assassin. When I saw the jailer, I asked about him. He told me that since he entered his cell he had not spoken a word. 'They say,' he added, 'that he will be shot inside of forty-eight hours.'

"During the short time that I was allowed that evening to walk in the courtyard, I stopped at his window. We talked together; he told me of his adventure, and answered my questions without embarrassment. When I left him I was convinced of his innocence. I asked and obtained permission to pass an hour or two in his cell, and then the poor fellow poured out to me his innermost thoughts. He considered himself both innocent and guilty. Remembering the horrible temptation which he had found the strength to resist, he feared that while asleep he had committed the very crime which he had dreamed of when awake. 'Could it not have been your companion?' I asked. 'Never!' he answered excitedly, 'Wilhelm is incapable' — He did not complete the sentence. His confidence in his friend was so boyish and so honest that I

shook his hand. 'When he awoke,' Prosper continued, 'he must have been so startled that he lost his presence of mind, and ran away.' 'Then your defense is easy,' I said, 'for Walhenfer's valise cannot have been stolen.'

"'Yes, yes!' he cried, 'I am innocent: I remember my dreams; I was playing with my schoolmates; it is not possible for me to have cut off that man's head while dreaming that I was running!' But in spite of the rays of hope that made him somewhat calmer, he still felt overwhelmed by remorse. He knew that in his heart he had committed murder; his hand had been raised—morally he was guilty. 'And yet, and yet I am innocent!' he cried. 'Oh, my poor mother! Perhaps at this moment she is chatting with some of her neighbors. If she knew that I had so much as thought of assassinating, it would kill her. And I am in prison, accused of a crime! Even if I did not kill that man, at least I shall kill my mother!'

"When he said this his eyes were dry, but with that suddenness of frenzy that is peculiar to the Picards, he threw himself against the wall, and had I not held him he would have dashed out his brains. 'Wait

till you are tried,' I said, 'you are sure to be acquitted; you are innocent, and your mother' —

"‘My mother,’ he cried, ‘will hear the accusation first; that is the way it always is in small towns like ours. She will hear it and die of grief. Besides, I am not innocent. Do you want to know the truth? I feel that I have lost the bloom of my conscience.’

"After that he sat down, crossed his arms on his breast, bowed his head and looked sadly to the ground. A moment later the turnkey came to take me back to my cell, but I was so sorry to leave him in such a state of discouragement that I caught him in my arms and embraced him.

"‘Be patient,’ I said, ‘and perhaps all will go well; if the voice of an honest man can help you to forget your fears, let me say that I both believe in and respect you.’

"At nine o'clock the next morning, a corporal and four soldiers came in search of him. On hearing them come in, I went to the window. When Prosper crossed the yard I caught his eye, and never shall I forget the look he gave me: it was one in which thoughts, presentiments, and resignation

were wedded with sadness. It was a sort of testament, silent and yet intelligible, in which one friend bequeathed his lost life to another. The solitude of the night must have been hard for him to bear, and yet perhaps his pallor denoted a stoicism which he had drawn from a fresh esteem of himself. It may be that he had purified his conscience with remorse, and expected to obliterate his sin with grief. He walked with a firm step. The blood with which his clothes had been stained and spotted was no longer visible. 'My hands must have dabbled in it while I slept,' he had told me, shudderingly, the night before.

"He was to appear, I heard, before a court-martial. The division was to advance the next day, and the brigadier-general had determined not to leave Andernach before meting out justice for the crime that had been committed. While the court-martial lasted, I was in a state of great nervous excitement. At noon, Prosper was brought back — I was then taking my usual walk. He saw me, and running to me threw himself into my arms. 'Lost!' he cried, 'I am irretrievably lost! In the minds of every one here I am and shall remain a murderer.' Then, lifting his head

with an air of pride, he added, 'This injustice has made me sure of my own innocence. My life would have been always troubled, my death will be without reproach. But is there a hereafter?' The whole of the eighteenth century was in that sudden question. He stood thinking. 'But tell me,' I asked, 'what did you say? What did they ask you?' He looked at me fixedly for a moment, and then answered, with a feverish vivacity of speech, 'First they asked me whether I had left the inn during the night. I answered that I had. "In what way?" they asked. I blushed, and answered, "Through the window." "Did you open it?" they asked. "Yes," I said, "I did." "You must have been very quiet over it; the innkeeper did not hear you." What could I say? The boatmen said they saw me going first to Andernach and then to the forest. I made several trips, they said; I buried the gold and diamonds. Anyhow, the valise has n't been found. You see I was struggling with my remorse: when I tried to speak, a pitiless voice called to me, "You wanted to do it, you wanted to do it." Everything was against me, even to myself. They asked me about my friend, and I defended him. "The

guilt lies," said they, "between you, your companion, the innkeeper and his wife. This morning all the doors and windows were found closed from the inside." When they told me that, I had neither voice nor strength. I was surer of my friend than of myself; I could not accuse him. I saw that we were looked upon as equally guilty and that I was regarded as the least adroit. I tried to explain the whole thing by somnambulism, but of course I failed. I am lost. I read my sentence in the judges' faces. Well, everything is over now, even to uncertainty. To-morrow I shall be shot. It is n't for myself that I care, but for my poor mother.' He stopped a moment and looked up at the sky. 'Frédéric!' — There! I've got it; his friend's name was Frédéric. Yes, that was certainly it," M. Hermann cried triumphantly.

My neighbor motioned to me to look at Taillefer. He had let his hand fall over his face, but between the spaces left by his fingers it seemed to us as though we saw a flame issuing from his eyes. "What do you say?" she whispered to me, "supposing his name was Frédéric!"

Hermann continued as follows: " 'Fré-

déric,' the young man exclaimed, 'Frédéric has basely deserted me. He was frightened, of course. It may be that he hid in the inn. Our two horses were in the court-yard this morning. How mysterious it is!' he added, after a moment's silence. 'Was it somnambulism or was it not? I have had but one attack, and that was when I was six years old.' He ground his heel on the pavement impatiently. 'Must I die a double death?' he continued, 'must I doubt a friendship begun in childhood and continued ever since? Where is Frédéric? Where can he be?' The tears came to his eyes. 'Come,' he said, 'let us go in. I prefer to be in my cell. I don't want them to see me crying. I will meet death bravely, but I am far from heroic now. I admit that I am sorry to die so young. I had no sleep last night: the scenes of my childhood were before me, and I saw myself playing on the very fields, the memory of which has brought me where I am. I had a fair future, and now — twelve men, a lieutenant, the command, "Carry arms, take aim, fire!" the beat of the drums and infamy! That is my future. Oh, there must be a God! If there were none it would all be too absurd.' He threw his

arms about me and pressed me to him. 'You are the only one to whom I can pour out my soul. You are free, you are, you will see your mother. I don't know whether you are rich or poor, and I don't care; you are the whole world to me. These people here won't fight forever. When the war is over, go to Beauvais. If my mother survives the news of my death you will see her. Tell her this for consolation — "He was innocent." She will believe you. I will write her a letter, but you will take her my last words, and tell her you were the last one on earth whose hand I held in mine. Poor mother! How she will love you, you, her son's last friend.' After a moment's pause he added, 'No one knows me here, and I am an object of horror to all. Were it not for you my innocence would be a secret between the heavens and myself.'

"I faithfully promised to fulfill his last wishes. He was touched, I could see, by what I said. A little later the soldiers came and led him back to the court-martial. He was sentenced to be shot. I am not familiar with the formalities that are customary in a trial of this kind, and I do not know whether the young surgeon defended

his life. In any event, he resigned himself to his fate, and passed the night in writing to his mother.

"The next morning, when I went to see him, he met me with a smile. 'We shall both be free soon,' he said, 'I hear the general has signed your pardon.' A look of disgust came over his face, and he added, 'Such a coward as I have been! The whole night through I begged and implored the walls to release me,' and he pointed to the walls of his cell. 'Yes,' he continued, 'I shrieked in despair. I revolted against fate; my agonies were hideous. I was alone! Now I think of what others will say. Courage is a garment. I shall put it on and meet death decently attired.' When"—

"Oh, don't tell the rest!" exclaimed the young girl who had asked for the story, and who then suddenly interrupted it. "Don't tell the rest; I don't want to hear it. I want to think he was saved. If I were sure he was shot I would n't sleep a wink."

Every one then left the table. As my neighbor took M. Hermann's arm she said to him, "He was shot, was he not?"

"Yes; I was present at the execution."

"Do you mean to say that you had the heart to"—

"He had asked me. Ah, it is a terrible thing to attend the funeral of a live man, a man whom you love, a man who deserves to live! The poor fellow kept his eyes fixed on mine the whole time. He seemed to live only in me. He wanted me, he said, to carry his last sigh back to his mother."

"And did you see her?"

"After the peace of Amiens, I entered France solely to bring her the beautiful words — 'he was innocent.' But she had died of consumption. When I burned the letter of which I was the bearer I was much affected. I dare say you will laugh at my Teutonic sentimentalism, but to me there was a drama of melancholy sublimity in the eternal secret whose farewells were thus buried between two tombs — farewells of which all the world was as ignorant as of the cry that rings in the desert when the traveler is surprised by a lion."

I interrupted him, and said: "Well, now, supposing you were brought face to face with a man in this drawing-room and you were told that he was the murderer; would n't that be another drama?"

M. Hermann took his hat and left abruptly.

"You act like a boy," my neighbor said, "and like a careless one at that. Just look at Taillefer: there he is, sitting in the corner; Mlle. Fanny is giving him a cup of coffee. See him smile. Could a murderer, after hearing that story, be as calm as he is? Why, he looks like a patriarch."

"So he does," I answered, "but go and ask him if he was in the German war."

"Why not?"

And with that audacity that women rarely lack, especially when they are interested in an undertaking or when they are curious about anything, my neighbor crossed the room to where Taillefer was sitting.

"Were you ever in Germany?" she asked.

Taillefer almost dropped his saucer.

"I, Madam? No, never."

"What are you talking about, Taillefer!" interrupted the banker. "Why, you were at Wagram."

"Ah yes," Taillefer answered, "at that time I was there."

My neighbor came back to where I was standing. "You are wrong," she said, "he is an honest man."

"As you will," I replied, "but before the

evening is over I will hunt the murderer from the mud in which he is hiding."

Every day there happens under our own eyes a phenomenon which is at once astounding and yet too simple to be remarked. When two men are brought together, one of whom, on account of his acquaintance with something that the other has done, or even from personal antipathy, feels that he has the right to despise him, the abyss that separates them is mutually and at once divined. They watch each other and keep on their guard. Their looks, their gestures, everything they do is impregnated with the emanation of their animosity. There is a loadstone between them. As in the case of the priest who could not consecrate the Host in the presence of the Evil Spirit, they are both defiant and both embarrassed. One is civil, the other taciturn; one changes color, the other trembles. The avenger is often as cowardly as the victim. Indeed, few people have the courage to punish, even though the punishment is deserved; from fear of a scandal or a tragedy, the majority hold their tongues and do nothing.

This intersusception of our natures established a mysterious current between Taille-

fer and myself. Since the time I had first spoken to him — while Hermann was telling the story — his eyes had avoided mine : it may be that they had also avoided those of the other guests, but of that I know nothing. He sat chatting with Fanny, the banker's guileless daughter, seeking, doubtless, after the manner of criminals, to find rest where innocence was. When he thought he could do so with impunity he looked at me, but our eyes invariably met and he was forced to look away. Outwearied at last, he took a seat at a card-table. I bet on the play of his adversary, but I did so with the hope of losing. This hope was fulfilled. I took the place of the player who went away, and found myself face to face with the murderer.

"I beg your pardon," I said, while he was dealing, "will you have the goodness to change the markers?"

Precipitately he passed the counters from left to right. My neighbor had approached the table. I looked at her significantly.

Turning to him again, I said, "Are you the M. Frédéric Taillefer whose family I was well acquainted with at Beauvais?"

"Yes, sir," he answered.

He let the cards fall, turned pale, put his

head in his hands, begged one of the players to take his place and got up.

"It is too warm here," he said. "I am afraid" —

The sentence was never completed. In an instant his face expressed the most terrible suffering, and he immediately left the room. The banker, with an air of great solicitation, went out after him. My neighbor and I looked at one another. She seemed grieved, I thought. A few moments later, when I too, after losing my money, had risen from the table, she led me to the window.

"Do you think you have been very compassionate?" she asked. "Would you care to have the power to read in every heart? Why interfere with human justice any more than with that of God? If we escape one we never escape the other. Do you think that the privileges of a judge of the general sessions are greatly to be envied? You have almost performed the office of an executioner."

"After having shared and stimulated my curiosity, what do you want to read me a lecture for?"

"You have made me reflect," she answered.

"Which means, I suppose, that scoundrels should sleep in peace and gold be deified. But let us change the subject. Look at that young girl who has just come in."

"What of her?"

"I saw her three days ago at the ball given by the Neapolitan ambassador, and admired her immensely. Do you know who she is? No one could tell me."

"That is Mlle. Victorine Taillefer."

I almost fainted.

"Her step-mother," my neighbor continued, "took her only a short time since from the convent where she was being educated. Previously her father had refused to acknowledge her. This is the first time that she has come here. She is not only good-looking — she is rich."

These last words were uttered in a tone that was significantly sarcastic. At that moment we heard the sound of stifled shrieks. They seemed to come from some neighboring room, and echoed faintly through the garden.

"Is n't that Taillefer's voice?" I asked.

We listened attentively, and heard the shrieks repeated. Our hostess hurried toward us and closed the window.

"Do help me," she said, "to prevent a scene; if Mlle. Taillefer hears her father she will be sure to have hysterics."

The banker reappeared; he looked about for Victorine, went to her and said something in a low tone. The girl screamed and was out of the room in a flash. This incident created an intense excitement. The card-playing ceased; every one stood up and asked each other questions.

"Do you suppose that he has" —

"Killed himself?" My neighbor laughed. "How deep would your mourning be if he had?"

"But what can have happened to him?"

"Poor man," said the hostess compassionately, "he is subject to a disease, the name of which I never can remember, and he has just had an attack."

"What kind of a disease is it?" some one inquired.

"It's an awful thing," she answered, — "there is no remedy for it. The agony, I hear, is something horrible. One day he had an attack at our country-seat. I had to go to one of my neighbors to avoid hearing him; his screams were heart-rending; he tried to kill himself; he was so frantic

that they had to put him in a strait-jacket. He thought he had rats in his head, gnawing his brain, and that each nerve was being sawed in two. The pain was so atrocious that he did not even feel the moxas that the physician applied with the hope of relieving him; the doctor he now has says it is a nervous affection, for which leeches should be applied to the neck and opium to the head; since he began this treatment his attacks have been less frequent, and only come on about once a year, towards the end of autumn. When he gets over one, he says he would rather be broken on the wheel than suffer such tortures."

"He must suffer a good deal, then," said a broker, the wit of the room.

"Why, last year," our hostess continued, "he almost died. He went to his country-seat on business, and through lack of assistance, I suppose, he was unconscious for twenty-four hours."

"Is n't it a kind of tetanus?" the broker inquired.

"Ah, as to that I don't know," she replied. "He has had it now for nearly thirty years. He says that in falling into a boat a splinter got in his head. His physician

thinks he can cure him. In England I hear they give prussic acid" —

At that moment a scream more piercing than the others resounded through the house.

"There, that's what I heard every minute," our hostess exclaimed. "It made me so fidgety that I could n't sit still. But the extraordinary part of the whole thing is that in spite of his tortures there is never any danger of his dying. When the pain ceases he is as well as ever. A German physician told him that it was a sort of gout in the head."

I left the group in which I had been standing, and went out at the same time as did Mlle. Taillefer. She was weeping.

"My poor father!" she cried. "What has he done to suffer so, he who is so good, so kind?"

On helping her into the carriage, I saw that her father was already in it. His daughter tried to deaden his groans by covering his mouth with a handkerchief. Unfortunately he saw me. His haggard face became convulsed; he shrieked aloud, and as the carriage drove away he gave me a look which was horror itself.

That dinner, and the incidents that succeeded it, exerted a peculiar influence on my life and sentiments. I loved Mlle. Taillefer, and all the more strongly, perhaps, since honor and delicacy forbade me to connect myself with a murderer, however good and kind he might be.

Through some fatality, I was induced to frequent the very houses where I knew I should meet Victorine. Often after I had sworn that I would give up seeing her I found myself in the evening at her side. The pleasure that I enjoyed was indescribable. My love was so filled with chimerical remorse that it had the savor of forbidden fruit. When Taillefer was with his daughter I was disgusted with myself for bowing to him, yet I bowed all the same. But then, Victorine is not only a pretty girl; she is well educated, talented, graceful and unaffected. When she speaks it is reservedly, and about her there is an atmosphere of insidious melancholy which none can resist. She loves me, or at least she lets me think that she does. She has a certain smile which she gives to no one but to me, and for me her voice grows softer. She loves me, yes; but she worships her father. She praises

his kindness, his goodness, and his wonderful qualities, and to me these praises are so many dagger thrusts.

One day I nearly became an accomplice of the crime through which the Taillefers laid the foundation of their wealth. I was on the point of asking for Victorine's hand in marriage. But I went away in time; I went to Germany, to Andernach. When I came back I found Victorine pale and subdued. Had I found her otherwise, had she been bright and gay, it would have been different; as it was, my love for her expanded with increased vigor. Fearing that my scruples might degenerate into monomania, I resolved to convoke a sanhedrin of pure consciences. I wanted light on this problem of ethics. The question had become even more complicated than it was before I went to Germany. The day before yesterday, therefore, I summoned those of my friends in whose honor and delicacy I had the most confidence. I invited two Englishmen, an attaché, a Puritan, an ex-minister in all the maturity of politics, a priest, an old man, my former guardian, — a simple-hearted gentleman whose trustee accounts are the most beautiful on record, — a lawyer, a notary, a judge; in brief, a repre-

sentative of every social opinion and practical virtue. We began by a good dinner and tumultuous conversation. At the dessert I told my story and asked for advice, omitting of course the young lady's name.

"Advise me," I said, when the story was told. "Discuss the question as though it were a law newly proposed. Billiard balls will be brought to you. Each can vote for or against my marriage in perfect secrecy."

During the profound silence that followed, the notary begged to be counted out. "There is the possibility of a contract in it," he said.

The wine had made my former guardian taciturn. To get him safely home, I was obliged to put him under the guardianship of some one else.

"I understand," I cried. "The non-expression of any opinion is an energetic way of telling me what I ought to do."

Movement in the assembly.

A land-owner, who had subscribed for General Foy's monument, exclaimed, "Like virtue, so crime, too, has its degrees."

The ex-minister nudged my elbow; "Chatterbox!" he muttered.

"Where is the difficulty?" asked a duke whose fortune consists in property confis-

cated from refractory Protestants at the time of the edict of Nantes.

The lawyer took the floor. "There is no difficulty," he cried, "his Grace is right. Was there not prescription? Where would any of us be if the origin of riches was looked into? This is a case of conscience. If you really wish to take it before a court, carry it to that of penitence."

The Code Incarnate sat down and drank a glass of champagne. The priest, whose duty it was to explain the gospel, arose. "God has made us weak," he said, firmly. "If you love the heiress of a crime, marry her, but give to the poor the gold she receives from her father, and be satisfied with that which comes to her from her mother."

"But," exclaimed one of those casuists who are so often met with in society, "but it is highly probable that had it not been for his money, the father would not have made such a good match. In this instance everything is the fruit of a crime."

"The discussion itself is a crime. There are things over which no one should deliberate," cried my former guardian, thinking, doubtless, he would solve the problem with a drunken sally.

"He's right," said the attaché.

"So he is," exclaimed the priest.

The two men agreed without meaning to do so. The floor was then taken by a theorist who had missed an election by one hundred and forty-nine votes out of one hundred and fifty.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is a phenomenon of an intellectual nature. Our decision, therefore, should be a fact extemporized from our consciences — an abrupt conception, an instinctive judgment, a transient expression of our inner nature, and one that should resemble the flashes that constitute the sentiment of taste. Let us vote."

"Let us vote," echoed the others.

To each I caused two balls to be given, one red and one white. The white, being a symbol of maidenhood, was to forbid the banns, the red to sanction them. I myself, out of delicacy, refrained from voting. The balls were then dropped into one of those narrow-necked wicker baskets which are used in playing pool. When all had voted, and the basket was examined, I found nine white balls in it. I was not surprised at this; among the judges were nine young men. Each of them had had the same idea. Evi-

dently there was a secret unanimity for, and a secret unanimity against, the marriage. What was to be done?

One of my former schoolmates, who was less discreet than the others, called out, "I say, where does the father-in-law live?"

"There is no father-in-law," I answered. "There was a time when my conscience spoke so clearly that your decision would have been unnecessary; if to-day its voice is weaker, it is not without cause. Two months ago I received this seductive announcement."

Thereupon, opening a portfolio, I exhibited the following invitation:—

Your presence is requested at the funeral service and burial of M. Jean-Frédéric Taillefer, of the firm of Taillefer & Company, formerly army contractor, Knight of the Legion of Honor, Knight of the Golden Spur, Captain of the First Company of Grenadiers, of the National Guard of Paris, who died Wednesday, May first, at his residence, Rue Juberbert; which will take place at . . . etc.

From . . . etc.

"Now tell me," I said, "what ought I to do? Let me put the question before you on

its widest basis. I admit that Mlle. Taillefer's money is stained with blood. I know that her father's legacy is an immense *hacienda*. But Prosper Magnan left no heir; moreover, it has been impossible for me to discover any trace of Walhenfer's family. If the money ought to be given back, who ought it to be given to? Then, besides, have I the right to betray a secret and increase an innocent girl's dower with a severed head? Have I the right to give her bad dreams, to take away her fairest illusion, to kill her father a second time? Have I the right to say to her, That gold of yours is polluted? I borrowed the 'Dictionary of Conscience Cases' from an old ecclesiastic, but I could n't find any solution of the problem in it. In the high tide of the nineteenth century it would be absurd to found a charitable institution for the repose of the souls of Magnan, Walhenfer and Taillefer. And even supposing I were to build a hospital or institute a prize for virtue; why, the prize for virtue would be given to swindlers! As for the hospitals, it seems to me that the majority of them are shelters for vice. Even if I did do anything of the kind, would it be a reparation? and if it would, do I need to make

one? Besides all this, I am in love; I am passionately in love. If now, without any plausible motive, I were to go to a young girl accustomed to luxury and elegance, — to one, in fact, who likes nothing better than to sit in a box at the opera and listen to Rossini's music, — if I were to go to such an one as she and suggest that it would be a good idea for her to give up fifteen hundred thousand francs in favor of stupid paralytics or scrofulous imbeciles, she would laugh in my face; or, if in the warmth of my affection I were to praise simplicity, and the advantages of living in a cottage on the Loire, if for the sake of our common love I were to insist that she should sacrifice Paris, I not only would be telling an untruth, but I would be making a fool of myself in the bargain. Some good-looking officer would come along, play duets with her, quote Byron and — carry her off! What then is to be done? Tell me, gentlemen, for Heaven's sake."

The honest man, a species of Puritan not unlike the father of Jeanie Deans, to whom allusion has been already made, and who up to this time had not breathed a syllable, shrugged his shoulders and hissed at me, "Idiot that you are! What possessed you to ask him if he was from Beauvais?"

MADAME FIRMIANI.



MADAME FIRMIANI.

THERE are stories which are so rich in dramatic situations that they can be told by any one and yet lose none of their beauties, but there are adventures which the accents of the heart can alone enliven; there are details — anatomical, so to speak — whose delicacies only appear under the most subtle infusions of thought; then there are portraits that demand a soul and which tell nothing unless each one of its changing expressions has been depicted; finally, there are certain things which cannot be accomplished or even attempted in the absence of those mysterious harmonies, those conjunctions of natural influences and personal predispositions, which at times preside over a day or an hour.

The foregoing introduction is necessary to the proper telling of this story, in which the writer seeks to interest those who, through the melancholy of their disposi-

tion, are most affected by infrequent and undefined emotions. Indeed, if the writer, like the surgeon at the bedside of a dying friend, feels a sincere respect for the subject which he handles, why should the reader not be invited to share the sentiment with him? Surely it cannot be a difficult task to initiate one's self into that vague and nervous sadness which casts solemn tints about us, and which resembles one of those illnesses whose languors are full of charm.

If, therefore, you happen to be thinking of friends that are gone, if you are alone, if it is night or nearly nightfall, read on, but otherwise put this tale aside. If you have not already lost some one who was dearly beloved you will not appreciate it. To some it will seem heavy with musk; to others, colorless as the pages of Florian. To enjoy it at all the reader should have known the blessedness of tears; he should have felt the dumb sorrow of a remembrance charged with a shadow dear but distant; he should have memories that bring regret, and yet be able to recall the smile of a vanished happiness.

And now please to believe that not for the wealth of the Orient would the writer

embellish his narrative with the slightest of poetic fictions. This is a true story, and one for which you can expend your entire sympathy, if you have any to expend.

There are to-day as many idioms in the French language as there are varieties of men in France. It is, therefore, both curious and amusing to listen to the different interpretations which the various species that comprise the monograph of the Parisians will give to the same incident; the Parisian in this case being taken to generalize the thesis. Supposing, for instance, that you had asked of one of the class called precise whether he knew Mme. Firmiani. Immediately you would get an inventory in reply: "A fine house in the Rue du Bac, handsome drawing-rooms, beautiful pictures, a hundred thousand a year, and a husband who was formerly a government official." After that your precise friend, who is always fat and usually in black, gives a little satisfied smile, curves his lower lip over the upper one and nods his head as who should say: "Fine people; there's nothing to be said against them." Ask him no more; the class to which he belongs explains all things by figures, income, or real estate (a word out of its dictionary).

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But supposing, on the other hand, that you have met some idler, and that you have put the same question to him. "Mme. Firmiani?" he will say, "why, of course; I go to her receptions. She is at home Wednesdays. Charming house." Already Mme. Firmiani has become metamorphosed into a house. The house is not a number of stones placed architecturally one on top of another; it is merely an idiom, untranslatable, but one which among idlers is in frequent use.

At this point your idler, who is generally a thin-faced fellow with an agreeable smile, a retailer of airy trifles, and one whose wit is seldom his own, bends forward and whispers in your ear: "I have never seen M. Firmiani. His social position consists in managing an estate in Italy, but his wife is French and spends her money like a Parisian. Her tea is delicious. It is one of the few houses to-day where the visitor is amused, and where he gets something fit to eat. At the same time, she does n't receive everybody, and consequently one meets only the best people there." Here the idler gravely commentates his phrases with a pinch of snuff, and seems to add: "I go there, but don't count on me to present you." For the

idler, Mme. Firmiani keeps a sort of signless inn.

“What the deuce do you want to do at Mme. Firmiani’s? Why, it is as stupid there as at court. What is the use in being intelligent, if your intelligence does n’t keep you clear of such houses as hers, where one hears nothing but rubbish?” This time you have questioned an egotist, one of those individuals who would like nothing better than to keep the universe under lock and key. Unhappy in the happiness of others, they are forgiving only to vices, failures, and infirmities. Aristocrats by inclination, they turn democrats so as to find inferiors among their equals.

“Mme. Firmiani? she is one of those adorable women who serve as excuse to nature for all the ugly ones created by mistake. She is simply delicious. I would like to be king simply to”—(here three whispered words). “Do you want to be presented?” This young man is the collegian, famous for his daring with men and his timidity with women.

“Mme. Firmiani?” another exclaims, with a wave of his stick. “I’ll tell you what I think of her. She is between thirty

and thirty-five, rather faded, fine eyes, poor figure, thin contralto voice, well dressed, a dab or two of rouge, charming manners; in short, the remnants of a pretty woman who is still well worth the trouble of falling in love with." This comes from your conceited friend who has just breakfasted, no longer weighs his words, and is about to take a canter. In such moments conceit is pitiless.

"She's got a magnificent gallery of pictures. Go see them: there's nothing finer." In this instance you have questioned the amateur. To him Mme. Firmiani is a collection of painted canvases.

A woman. "Mme. Firmiani? I wish you would n't go there." This phrase is the richest of translations. Mme. Firmiani! dangerous woman! a siren! She dresses well, she has good taste, she keeps other women awake! Your interlocutrix belongs to the nagging class.

An attaché. "Mme. Firmiani? Is n't she from Antwerp? Ten years ago, when I saw her, she was very handsome. That was at Rome." Attachés have a mania for talking *à la* Talleyrand. Their wit is so delicate that their ideas are intangible. They are like billiard players that make clever

misses. As a rule, they talk but little, yet when they do talk, Spain, Vienna, Italy, and St. Petersburg are their only topics. To them the names of countries are like springs; touch them, and they go off just like alarm clocks.

“Does n’t this Mme. Firmiani see a great deal of the Faubourg Saint - Germain?” This is said by a person who wants to appear to know all about the best society — a person who gives a *de* to every one from Dupin to Lafayette, who dishonors people with it.

“Mme. Firmiani, sir? I don’t know her.” This individual is a duke. He only recognizes women that have been presented at court. He got his title from Napoleon.

“Mme. Firmiani? is n’t she a retired opera-singer?” This is the idiot, — the man who wants to have an answer for everything. He would rather lie than hold his tongue.

Two old ladies. The first (wrinkled face, pointed nose, harsh voice). “Who was this Mme. Firmiani?”

The second (little red face like a pomegranate, soft voice). “A Cadignan, my dear, a niece of the old Prince de Cadignan, and consequently cousin to the Duke of Maufrigneuse.”

Mme. Firmiani is a Cadignan. She might be without virtue, without fortune, without youth; none the less she is a Cadignan, and to be a Cadignan is to be like a prejudice, — ever rich and deathless.

A man who thinks for himself. “I have never seen any overshoes in her vestibule. You can go there without danger of being compromised, and you can play cards without fear of being swindled. If there are any cheats there, at least they are well-bred: they don’t quarrel on their way out.”

An old gentleman given to observation. “If you go to see Mme. Firmiani you will find a beautiful woman seated at the fire-side. I doubt if she will rise to greet you. She only does so for women or ambassadors. She is very graceful and charming. She talks well and talks on all subjects. She is married, but no one has ever seen her husband. M. Firmiani is a thoroughly fantastic personage; he is like the third horse on the postchaise, for which one pays, yet never sees. If the musicians are to be believed, Mme. Firmiani is the finest contralto in Europe, but has not sung three times since she has been in Paris. She keeps open house and visits no one.”

The observer speaks like a prophet. His listener is obliged to accept his words, his anecdotes, and his citations, as he would the gospel truth, or else pass for an uneducated boor. He is about forty years old, never dines at home, and gives out that women rarely find him dangerous. His hair is powdered, he wears a brown coat, and he has a seat in half a dozen boxes at the Bouffons. Sometimes he is confounded with the parasites, but the positions which he has held are too high to permit any one to suspect that he is a sponge; besides which, he owns some property in a part of the country that he never mentions.

"Mme. Firmiani? Why, my dear fellow, she was one of Murat's mistresses."

This comes from one of the class that deal in contradictions, the people who do the *errata* in all memoirs, who straighten everything, wager a hundred to one, and are positive on all subjects. In an hour's conversation you can catch them in the *flagrante delictu* of ubiquity. They will tell you they were in Paris at the time of the Mallet conspiracy, forgetting that but little before they had crossed the Bérésina. Almost all of them are decorated, speak in a

loud tone, have retreating foreheads and play high stakes.

"Mme. Firmiani? a hundred thousand a year? You must be crazy! You give people incomes with the prodigality of an author dowering a heroine. Don't you know that Mme. Firmiani ruined a young fellow the other day and prevented him from making a good match? She would be penniless were it not for her beauty."

This speaker you recognize at once. His name is Envy, and not one of his characteristics need description; they are as well known as those of the domestic cat. But who shall explain the perpetuity of envy? A vice that yields nothing!

The men of the world, the men of letters, the honest men, in short the men of every class, were engaged during the month of January, 1824, in circulating so many different opinions about Mme. Firmiani that it would be an idle task to enumerate them all in these pages: suffice it to say that any one interested in knowing her without caring or being able to go to her house would have had equally good reasons to believe her to be married or widowed, rich or poor, stupid or witty, virtuous or depraved, sen-

sitive or soulless, beautiful or ugly; in a word, there were as many Mme. Firmianis as divisions of society or sects in Catholicism. How terrible it is to reflect that, one and all, we are like lithographic plates from which slander draws an unlimited number of copies. The proofs resemble the model or differ from it in shades so imperceptible that reputation half the time depends on the balance derived by each between Truth that limps and Falsehood that is winged.

As is the case with many proud and noble women who make a sanctuary of their heart and disdain the world, Mme. Firmiani might have been greatly misjudged by a certain M. de Bourbonne, an old gentleman who thought much about her during the winter of that year. Through a lucky chance, however, M. de Bourbonne belonged to the class of provincial agriculturalists who are in the habit of noticing all things and of driving bargains with peasants. In a business of this kind, a man becomes sagacious in spite of himself, very much as courage is drilled into a soldier.

M. de Bourbonne, who had come from Touraine, and to whom the Parisian idioms were not in all respects satisfactory, was a

highly esteemed old gentleman who planted many a shade tree for the future enjoyment of his sole heir, a nephew.

When a man is so constituted that he can watch his trees expand and improve, and at the same time think of his heir without displeasure, his affection increases each time he handles a spade. Admittedly this phenomenon is infrequent, yet it is still observable in Touraine.

The nephew, whose name was Octave de Camps, was a descendant of the famous Abbé de Camps, so well known to bibliophiles, or rather to the erudite, which is not quite the same thing. Now country people have a bad habit of looking askant at young men who sell their estates. This gothic prejudice interferes with the stock jobbing which the government has been obliged to encourage, and Octave, without so much as consulting his uncle, had suddenly disposed of a piece of property in favor of the black band. On this piece of property stood the Château de Villaines, which would have been demolished had it not been for the old gentleman's timely interference. Such anger as he then experienced was greatly increased when one of Octave's friends, — a

distant connection, a man of that class of whom prudent people say, "I should n't care to have a law suit with *him*," — came to tell him that his nephew was utterly ruined, and that, after having squandered his fortune on a Mme. Firmiani, had been obliged, while awaiting his uncle's legacy, to become a teacher of mathematics. This news was conveyed to M. de Bourbonne when he was engaged in comfortably digesting a copious provincial dinner.

Fortunately, however, there is a God for uncles as well as for drunkards. Thanks to his obstinacy, he refused to credit a single word of the whole story, and thereby routed the indigestion which his nephew's biography might have caused.

There are blows that affect the heart and others that affect the brain ; that of the distant connection struck at the bowels and produced no effect, for the simple reason that the old man had an excellent stomach. Like a true disciple of St. Thomas, M. de Bourbonne soon after, and without his nephew's knowledge, set out for Paris for the purpose of obtaining exact information. Through his relatives in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, — the Listomères, the Lenoncourts and the

Vandenesses, — he heard so many contradictory reports about Mme. Firmiani that he determined to be presented to her under an assumed name, that of M. de Rouxellay ; Rouxellay being the name of his estate.

With his usual prudence, the evening which he chose to study his nephew's friend was one during which he knew that Octave would be engaged in terminating a highly paid price of work ; for Octave, he had learned, was always welcome at Mme. Firmiani's, a circumstance which no one could explain. As to his ruin, it was, unfortunately, not a fable.

M. de Rouxellay was entirely unlike the typical uncle in a play. An ex-guardsman, a man accustomed to the best society and one moreover who had been quite a lady-killer in his day, he was necessarily refined in manner, well-bred and able to pay a graceful compliment. Although he loved the Bourbons with a noble candor, believed in God as gentlemen do, and read only the *Quotidienne*, he was not half as ridiculous as the liberals in his part of the country would have liked to have had him. In the world he could hold his own with any one, provided the conversation did not turn on

Rossini's "Moses in Egypt," the drama, romanticism, local color or railroads. He had stopped short at Voltaire, Buffon, Peyronnet, and Glück, the queen's household musician.

"If that woman," he said to the Marquise de Listomère, to whom he had given his arm on entering Mme. Firmiani's drawing-room, "if that woman is my nephew's mistress I am sorry for him. How is it possible for her to live surrounded by luxury when she knows him to be in a garret? How, indeed, unless she is utterly selfish! Octave is a fool to have squandered his money for such a creature as she."

"But supposing he had lost it at play?"

"In that case he would at least have had the pleasure of gambling."

"And do you think he has had none at all? Why, look at Mme. Firmiani."

The old gentleman's fairest memories waned and faded when he stood before her. His anger expired in a compliment. Through a combination of circumstances that happen only to pretty women, Mme. Firmiani had never appeared to greater advantage than she did at that moment. There are trifles that heighten a woman's

beauty which are never appreciated unless the observer has studied the little revolutions that occur during an evening reception. Satisfied with her gown, amused at her own wit, happy in the admiration which she excites, and proud of being the queen of a room that is peopled by clever men, a woman then is conscious of her beauty and her grace, and under the warmth of admiring glances grows visibly fairer than before. In moments such as these a woman acquires a power that is well-nigh supernatural; her eyes fascinate and her smile enchants. Now if conditions of this kind make even a plain woman attractive, think of the garment of splendor which they give to a woman who is naturally beautiful, and particularly to one dressed with a taste that was admired by artists and admitted by her most bitter rivals!

Did you ever have the good fortune to meet a woman whose voice was so harmonious that it lent to her words the same charm that was noticeable in her manner? A woman who knew the secret of silence as well as that of speech, whose words were well chosen and whose diction was pure? In that case you have met a woman whose

jesters are caresses and whose criticisms never wound, a woman who argues as little as she declaims, but one who knows how to lead a discussion and when it should be stopped. Her manner is easy and pliant, her civility is never forced ; respect she has turned into a benignant shadow ; she never wearies you, and she makes you pleased with her and with yourself. Her taste and grace you see repeated in the objects that surround her. All things in her house delight the eye ; the air one breathes there is the air of home. Then, too, she is natural. She is given neither to pose nor to affectation. Her sentiments are expressed with simplicity, because they are sincere. Though candid, she yet offends no one. She takes men as God has made them, pitying those who are wicked and forgiving those who are absurd. She understands each age. She is never annoyed, for her tact has made her clairvoyant. Both tender and light-hearted, she first aids and then consoles. Your love for her is so great that did she err you would justify the error. Such was Mme. Firmiani.

When M. de Bourbonne had chatted with her for fifteen minutes, his nephew was absolved. He understood that whether the

gossips were right or wrong, some mystery covered such relations as existed between Octave and his hostess. Returning to the illusions of youth, and judging Mme. Firmiani by her beauty, it did not take him long to decide that a woman so thoroughly dignified as she appeared to be was incapable of committing an evil deed. Her black eyes indicated such a condition of mental calm, the lines of her face were so delicate, the contours were so pure, and the *liaison* of which she was accused seemed to rest so lightly on her heart, that in noting these things the old gentleman saw the stamp of virtue in her adorable physiognomy, and murmured to himself, "That nephew of mine has made a fool of himself in some way."

Mme. Firmiani admitted that she was twenty-five years old. But she had certain precise acquaintances who proved that as she was married in 1813, at the age of sixteen, she must in 1825 be at least twenty-eight. Nevertheless these selfsame people asserted that at no other time had she been so attractive and so thoroughly feminine.

She was childless and had never been a mother. The problematic Firmiani, who in

1813 was a very respectable octogenarian, had given her, it was said, only his name and his fortune. She was therefore reaching that age when the Parisian best understands a love affair, and perhaps in idle moments innocently desires one. She was acquainted with all that the world sells, all that it lends, all that it gives. The attachés were wont to say that if there was anything she did not know it was not worth the knowing. Those who dealt in contradictions were of the opinion that she was still ignorant on many subjects. The observers said that her hands were very white, her foot very small, and her movements a trifle too undulant; but all classes envied or contested Octave de Camps's good luck, while agreeing that she was the most aristocratically beautiful woman in Paris.

Still young, rich, an accomplished musician, witty, refined, and, in her quality of Cadignan received by the Princesse de Blamont - Chauvry, — the oracle of the noble faubourg, — beloved by her rivals, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse her cousin, the Marquise d'Espard and Mme. de Macumer, she flattered every one of the vanities through which love is nourished and aroused.

In brief, she was sought after by too many people not to become a victim to the refined gossip and delicious calumnies that are whispered behind a fan.

The prefatory observations with which this story begins have, therefore, been necessary for the proper differentiation between Mme. Firmiani as she was, and Mme. Firmiani as the world saw her. At the same time the sketch here given can convey but a faint idea of her actual characteristics. It would take the pencil of Ingrès to represent the nobility of her forehead, the luxuriance of her hair, the majesty of her gaze, and the changing expressions that altered with the colors of her cheek. There was about her something of all women. A poet would have recognized in her both Jeanne d'Arc and Agnes Sorel, and seen, too, the unknown, the soul hidden beneath a deceptive cloak; the soul of Eve, the treasures of virtue and the wealth of evil, sin and resignation, crime and devotion, the Haidee and Julia of Don Juan.

The ex-guardsman was impertinent enough to linger after every one else had gone. He was seated very calmly in a chair, and he was seated, moreover, with the obstinacy of a

fly, that has to be killed to be gotten rid of. The clock struck two.

"Madam," he said, at the moment when his hostess stood up with the intention of giving him to understand that she wished him to leave, "Madam, I am the uncle of M. Octave de Camps."

Mme. Firmiani promptly sat down again. In spite of his perspicacity, M. de Bourbonne could not tell whether she blushed from shame or pleasure. There are pleasures that have something in common with startled modesty; there are delicious emotions that the purest heart would keep forever veiled, and there are women, inconceivable in their divine capriciousness, who long to hear every one pronounce the very name which they have buried in their hearts. It was not entirely in this manner that M. de Bourbonne interpreted the emotion which his hostess displayed, but then it should be remembered that the old countryman was suspicious.

"Well, sir?" and Mme. Firmiani looked at him in that essentially clear and significant way in which men never see anything, because it is a trifle too inquisitive.

"Well, madam," he replied, "do you

know what they tell me in Touraine? They say that my nephew has ruined himself for you, and that while he lives in a garret you are in a palace. You will, I trust, forgive my frankness; indeed, it is only right that you should hear what" —

"Stop, sir!" Mme Firmiani exclaimed, interrupting the old gentleman with an imperious gesture, "I know all that. You are too courteous to continue a conversation when I have asked you to cease; you are too gallant — in the earlier acceptation of the word" — she added ironically, "not to recognize the fact that you have no right to question me. In any event, it would be absurd for me to attempt to justify my conduct. I hope you respect me sufficiently to believe in the thorough contempt that I have for money, albeit I was married without dower to a man who was immensely wealthy. As to your nephew, I do not know whether he is rich or poor. If I have received him, and if I continue so to do, it is because I regard him as worthy of being among my friends, and my friends, sir, one and all, respect each other; they know that I am not philosophic enough to see people whom I do not esteem. I may

be lacking in charity, but my guardian angel has fostered within me a profound aversion both for dishonesty and tittle-tattle."

The first few phrases of this reply were uttered in a tone that was slightly tremulous, but the last words were pronounced with the *aplomb* of Célimène mocking the misanthrope.

"Madam," returned the count, "I am an old man; Octave is almost a son to me. I beg you therefore in advance the most humble of pardons for the one question that I shall take the liberty to ask, and I give you the word of a loyal gentleman that your answer shall rest here." At these words he put his hand on his heart with a gesture that was sincerely religious; then he continued. "Are the gossips right? Do you love Octave?"

"Sir, to any one else I would make answer but by a look; but of you, and because of your relationship to M. de Camps, I will ask, What would you think of a woman who, to such a question, answered 'Yes'? For a woman to acknowledge her affection to him whom she loves, when he loves her, even — well, even when she is certain of being always beloved, is — believe me, sir — an

effort to her and a recompense to him ; but to another ! ” —

Mme. Firmiani did not finish her sentence. She rose from her seat, bowed, and then disappeared into another apartment, each one of whose doors, successively opened and shut, had a language of its own for the old man's ears.

“ What a woman ! ” he exclaimed, “ what a woman ! a devil or an angel, one of the two.” Then he sought his carriage. From time to time the horses had awakened the echoes of the court-yard with the noise of their hoofs, but the driver, after having cursed his fare a hundred times, slept soundly.

At about eight o'clock the next morning, M. de Bourbonne ascended the stairway of a house in the Rue de l'Observance, where Octave de Camps lived. If any one was ever astonished, it was the young professor when he saw his uncle. The key was in the door, the lamp was still burning ; the night had been passed in work.

“ Since when, sir,” said M. de Bourbonne, with affected severity, as he took a seat, “ since when, sir, is it customary for an only heir to make fun of an uncle who has twenty-six thousand a year from good Tou-

ranian lands? Do you know that in my time we respected such relatives? But tell me, have you any fault to find? Am I such a very bad uncle after all? Have I ever insisted on your respect? Have I ever refused you money? Have I ever slammed the door in your face under pretext that you had come to see how my health was? Have n't you the easiest, the most indulgent uncle in France? Mark me, I don't say in Europe, for that would be pretentious. You write to me, or you don't write. I live on the faith of your affection. I keep in order for you the prettiest bit of ground in the country, but one which I propose to hold on to as long as possible; and Monsieur, if you please, squanders his fortune, lives like a lackey, and has neither servants nor suite" —

"But, uncle" —

"It is n't a question of uncle, but of nephew. I have a right to your confidence, so come, confess at once; it is the easiest way, I know that by experience. Have you been gambling? Have you been speculating? Out with it, say, 'Uncle, I am a good-for-nothing wretch,' and I will embrace you. But if you tell me one fib bigger than what I would have told at your age, I will sell my

property, buy an annuity, and if possible, live all over again the gay days of my youth."

"But, uncle" —

"I saw your Mme. Firmiani yesterday," and the uncle kissed the tips of his fingers. "She is charming. You have the privilege of a king, and the approbation of your uncle: you have his consent too, if that is of any use to you. As to the sanction of the church, that, I take it, is needless: the sacraments are doubtless too dear. And now tell me, is it for her that you have ruined yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, that woman! I would have wagered it. In my time the ladies of the court circle could ruin a man quicker than a courtesan of to-day. In her I recognized the last century rejuvenated."

"You are mistaken," Octave replied, sadly. "Mme. Firmiani is well worthy of your esteem."

"Fiddlesticks. Tell me a lot of nonsense, won't you? All the same you might remember that I was n't born yesterday."

"See, uncle, here is a letter which will explain everything," and the young man drew one from a handsome portfolio (a present doubtless from her). "When you have read

it I will tell you what remains to be told, and you will then know a Mme. Firmiani who is unknown to the rest of the world."

"I have n't my spectacles," the uncle answered. "Read it to me."

Octave began as follows:—

"‘My dearest Friend’"—

"You are intimate with her, then, are you?"

"Why, certainly."

"And you have had no quarrel?"

"Quarrel! Of course not. We were married at Gretna Green."

"Well, then," pursued M. de Bourbonne, "why do you dine in cheap restaurants?"

"Let me read the letter and you will see." And Octave took the letter up again and began to read, but with an emotion that was visible.

"‘You have asked me why I am sad. Has my sadness, then, passed from my soul to my face, or did you merely divine it? And yet, why should you not have done so? Surely, at heart we are one. Besides, I cannot lie, and that perhaps is a misfortune. One of the conditions on which a woman is loved is that she be ever caressing and gay. It may be that I ought to deceive you, but that I

would not do, even though the deception were necessary for the expansion or preservation of the happiness which you bring me and with which I am overwhelmed. Ah, dear, how grateful is the love I bear you! It is one which is enduring and unlimited, but it is one that has made me wish to be always proud of you. A woman's glory is all in all in him whom she loves. Esteem, respect, honor, everything she places in him who has taken all. And yet you, my beloved, have faltered. The disclosure you lately made has dulled the joy of the past. Since that moment I have felt humiliated in you, in you whom I looked upon as the purest of men, as you are the most loving and tender. I needs must have great confidence in your heart to tell you that which is terrible for me to tell. It is this. Your father's wealth was the booty of a robber: you know it, and you keep it. And it was this you told me in a room filled with the dumb witnesses of our love, you who are a gentleman, a noble, my husband, and but twenty-two! What monstrosities! I have tried to find excuses for you: I have attributed your carelessness to the heedlessness of youth, for I know there is still much of boyhood in you, and I told

myself that perhaps as yet you had not thought seriously on such subjects as honor and honesty. Your laugh cut me to the quick. Try then to remember that there is a family ruined and always in tears, that there are children who curse you perhaps each day, and that an old man says at night, I should not be without bread if the father of M. de Camps had been an honest man !' ”

“ You don't mean to say,” M. de Bourbonne interrupted, “ you don't mean to say that you had the stupidity to tell that woman about your father's suit with the Bourgneufs ? Women understand how to squander a fortune, but as to making one ” —

“ At least they understand what honesty is. But let me read the rest.”

“ ‘ Octave, there is no power in the world that can alter the language of honor. Consult your conscience, and ask of it by what name the deed is called to which you owe your gold.’ ”

The nephew glanced at the uncle, and the uncle lowered his eyes to the ground.

“ ‘ I will not tell you all the thoughts that beset me, for they may be reduced to one, which is this : I cannot esteem a man who

knowingly sullies himself for a sum of money, however large or small that sum may be. A hundred sous stolen at play, or six times a hundred thousand francs that come from a legal trickery, cover a man with the same dishonor. Then too, I consider myself tarnished in an affection which was once my greatest joy. From the depths of my soul there arises a voice that my tenderness cannot hush. Ah, Octave, I have wept because my conscience was stronger than my love! You might commit a crime, and could I do so, I would hide you from justice in my arms, but my devotion would go no further. To a woman, love is the most limitless confidence joined to an inexpressible longing to venerate and adore the man to whom she belongs. I have never looked upon love otherwise than as a fire that constantly purifies the noblest sentiments, — a fire that develops them all. And now I have but one thing to add. Come to me poor, and, if such a thing is possible, my love will be greater than before; otherwise, you must give me up. If I do not see you again I shall know how to act. Yet still, understand me well, I do not wish you to make restitution because I advise such a course. Consult your own conscience.

An act of justice should never be a sacrifice to love. I am your wife and not your mistress ; it is therefore less a question of pleasing me than of preserving my respect. If I am wrong, if I have misjudged your father's conduct, in a word, if you think your fortune is legitimate, — oh, how glad I would be were I able to persuade myself that you deserve no blame ! Then decide it all in accordance with the dictates of your better nature. Be guided but by yourself. A man who loves sincerely, as you love me, respects the morality with which his wife inspires him too highly to be dishonest. I reproach myself now for all that I have just written. One word perhaps were sufficient. It is my instinct to preach that has carried me on. Scold me then, not too severely, but still a little. Dear, between us two, are not you the stronger ? You alone should see your faults.' ”

“ Well, uncle ? ” said Octave, whose eyes were full of tears.

“ But you have n't finished. I see more writing.”

“ After what I read come things that are meant only for a lover's eye.”

“ Right, my boy,” the old man said, “ you

are right. Fortune has smiled on me. I too have loved. *Et in Arcadia ego*. At the same time I don't quite understand why you give lessons in mathematics."

"My dear uncle, I am your nephew; and that very fact ought to explain to you without the need of words that I made something of a hole in the capital which my father left me. After I read that letter my entire nature was revolutionized, and in one moment I paid all the back interest of my remorse. I can never describe to you the condition that I was in. When I drove to the Bois, an interior voice called to me, 'Is that horse yours?' At table I asked myself, 'Is not this dinner stolen?' My honesty was so young that it was ardent. The first thing I did was to go to Mme. Firmiani, and the delight that I then experienced millions could not buy. Together we went over the accounts and added up what I owed to the Bourgneufs. Contrary to Mme. Firmiani's advice I condemned myself to pay three per cent. interest, but as my entire fortune was not large enough to cover the amount, we felt that we were sufficiently one, she to offer and I to accept her savings."

“You don’t mean to tell me that beside her other virtues that adorable woman is economical?” M. de Bourbonne exclaimed.

“Don’t laugh at her, uncle. Her position forces her to be very careful. Her husband went to Greece in 1820, and died there three years ago. Up to this time it has been impossible to obtain the legal evidence of his death, or to procure the will which he must have made in her favor. She does not know, therefore, but that any day she may be compelled to give up her property to other heirs, and for that reason she is obliged, as I have said, to be very careful about her expenditures; particularly so, as she does not care to leave her opulence in the same manner that Chateaubriand has just left office. For my part, I want to acquire a fortune that will be my own, so that if my wife is ruined she may still be wealthy.”

“And you never told me all this! why didn’t you come to me? Don’t you think I love you well enough to pay your debts, especially your debts of honor? But there! I am like the uncle in a climax, — I will be revenged!”

“As to that, I am not afraid. If you

want to help me, give me an income of a thousand crowns until I need capital for some enterprise. At this moment I am so happy that my only thought is to live. I give lessons so as not to be a burden to any one. But I have not told you about the Bourgneufs, nor of the pleasure that I enjoyed in making the restitution. After some little difficulty I found them, utterly miserable and completely destitute. They were living in a hovel at Saint-Germain. The father was in charge of a lottery office, and his daughters kept the books and did the cooking. The mother is an invalid. The girls are beautiful, but they have learned at a hard school the small value the world sets on undowered beauty. What a tableau I found there! I entered as an accomplice in a crime; I came away an honest man. I restored to my father his good name. But there! I have neither the right nor the inclination to judge him. There is an excitement in a law suit that at times blinds the most honest of men. Lawyers know how to make the absurdest claims seem valid. To the errors of conscience, laws are indulgent syllogisms, and judges have a right to be wrong. My adventure itself

was a drama. To take the part of Providence, of a day dream, to realize that wish to have twenty thousand a year that we all of us laughingly make, to turn a look of hatred into one of gratitude, astonishment and admiration, to throw wealth in the face of poverty, — no, indeed, words are not vivid enough to picture such a scene! I was so just that I seemed unjust; but at any rate, if there is a paradise my father must be happy in it. As for me, I am beloved as no other man has been before. Mme. Firmiani has given me more than happiness; she has given me a refinement that I lacked. I call her, therefore, my dear conscience, — a love term that answers to certain harmonies of the heart. Honesty is its own reward. Through my own efforts I hope soon to be rich, and even now I am trying to solve an industrial problem which, if successful, will bring me millions.”

“You have your mother’s heart,” said the old man, restraining with difficulty the tears that rose to his eyes at the thought of his sister.

At that moment, in spite of the distance between the street and the room in which nephew and uncle were seated, the young

man caught the sound of an approaching carriage.

"It is she!" he cried. "I recognize her horses by the way they stop."

A little later, the door opened and Mme. Firmiani entered: as she did so, and on perceiving M. de Bourbonne, she drew back with a little movement of graceful vexation, but at once she said smilingly, "Do not think I am not glad to see you, for I am come to kneel before my husband and beg him to accept my fortune. The Austrian Embassy has just sent me the documents that attest M. Firmiani's death. They are all in order, and the will which his valet had kept to give me is with them. Now, Octave, you can accept everything, though as it is you are richer than I, for you have treasures there to which only God could add."

At these words, Mme. Firmiani rested her hand on her husband's heart, and then, unable any longer to contain her happiness, hid her head on his shoulder.

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THE “GRANDE BRETÈCHE.”

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THE "GRANDE BRETÈCHE."

"AH, madam," the doctor answered, "I have some terrible stories in my repertory."

From all sides came the request that he should tell one. When silence had been obtained, Bianchon, with a complacent gesture, began as follows:—

"On the banks of the Loire, a short distance from Vendôme, there stands an old house, brown, gabled and solitary. There is no other house near it; there is no tannery, nor even one of those taverns that are usually to be found on the outskirts of small towns. Extending down before it to the river is a garden, where the once orderly box-trees that marked the alleys now interconnect at will. The house itself is partially concealed from sight by a number of willows. The sloping shore is covered by a luxuriant growth of weeds. The fruit-trees, neglected for years, no longer produce, while

the fallen leaves and broken twigs form a dense coppice beneath them. The paths, which once were sanded, have entirely disappeared. There is only one place from which a good view of the house and grounds can be had, and that is from the summit of the neighboring mountain, near the ruins of the castle of the dukes of Vendôme. From this vantage ground it looks as though it had once been the habitation of a gentleman who had a fondness for cultivating fruits and flowers. An arbor, or rather the remnants of an arbor, in which a table stands is still to be seen. At the appearance of this garden which is no more, the negative joys of provincial existence are divined as readily as the life of an honest tradesman is guessed from the epitaph on his tombstone. By way of finishing touch to the pervasive melancholy which the entire place exhales there is a sun-dial there, bearing the religiously commonplace inscription: 'Ultimam Cogita.'

"The roof of the house is utterly decayed. The shutters are never opened, the balconies are covered with swallows' nests, the doors are closed. Weeds have lined the steps with green. The ironwork is brown with

rust. Sun, moon, summer, winter, rain and snow have rotted the wood, warped the boards and destroyed the paint. The mournful silence that reigns there is disturbed, if at all, only by the coming and going of birds and reptiles. Over it all the word *Mystery* has been written by an invisible hand.

"On approaching it from the road a curved-topped wooden gate is to be seen, in which the children of the town have made a number of holes. This gate, I afterwards learned, had been locked for ten years. Through the holes a view can be had of the court-yard. There the disorder is the same. The stones are framed in bouquets of weeds. The walls are furrowed by crevices and festooned with climbing plants, the steps that lead to the door of the house are out of place, the bell-rope is worn away, the water-spouts are broken. Instinctively one wonders what can have happened; whether God has been insulted there or France betrayed; but the walls give no answer, and the reptiles crawl on without reply.

"This empty and deserted house is an enigma whose solution is known to no one. Formerly it was a little *fief*, and called the 'Grande Bretèche.' During my stay at Ven-

dôme, where Desplein had left me to take care of a rich invalid, one of my chief pleasures consisted in visiting it. It was far better than a ruin, for in a ruin there is little to interest save some few reminiscences of doubtful authenticity. But this house, still upright, yet which an avenging hand was slowly pulling to pieces, held a secret, an undisclosed idea, or at least a caprice.

“Often in the evening I rowed down to the wild hedge that masked it, and, braving the briars, entered the ungoverned garden and remained there contemplating its disorder for hours at a time.

“I questioned no one concerning it. Indeed, I preferred to remain in ignorance than to learn from some chatterbox the reason of its eccentric appearance. Had I learned the possibly commonplace cause of its abandonment, the poetic thoughts which it inspired would have been dissipated. To me it represented the varied images of an unhappy life. At times it had about it the air of a deserted cloister; at others the peace of a cemetery, but a peace unbroken by the epitaphic tongue of the dead. Now it was the house of a leper, again that of Atrides; but above all it suggested the collected thoughts and hour-glass existence of provincial life.

"I have often wept there, but I never laughed. More than once I have been startled by the dumb rustle of a ring-dove's wings passing hurriedly above me. The ground there is damp, and its savage liberty is a freehold for snakes and lizards. The visitor is obliged to take precautions against the cold, for in a moment or two a mantle of ice falls on his shoulders like the commander's hand on the neck of Don Juan.

"One night I shuddered. The wind had set a rusty weathercock in motion, and at the very moment when I had conceived a dismal drama that would account for the monumentalized grief about me, its creaks and cries seemed like groans issuing from the house. I went back to my inn pensive and oppressed. When I had eaten my supper the landlady entered my room, and said mysteriously: 'Here is M. Regnault, sir.'

" 'Who is M. Regnault?'

" 'What, does n't Monsieur know him? That's odd,' she said, as she left the room.

"The next moment a man appeared, hat in hand. He was tall and slim and dressed in black. He entered like a ram preparing to rush upon a rival, presenting as he did so a retreating forehead, a pointed head and a

pale face that I can only compare to a glass of dirty water. His coat was old and shiny about the seams, but in his lace shirt front there glittered a diamond, and in his ears were gold rings.

“ ‘To whom have I the honor of speaking?’ I asked.

“He took a seat before the fire, put his hat on the table, rubbed his hands together and answered: ‘I am M. Regnault.’

“I bowed, saying to myself, ‘*Il bono cani!* Find it.’

“ ‘I am,’ he continued, ‘the notary at Vendôme.’

“ ‘Delighted, sir,’ I exclaimed, ‘but for reasons best known to myself I am in no hurry to make my will.’

“ ‘One moment, sir,’ he said, raising his hand as though to admonish me to be silent, ‘permit me to speak; I hear that you are in the habit of visiting the “Grande Bretèche.” ’

“ ‘What if I am?’

“ ‘One moment,’ he added, repeating his former gesture: ‘this action on your part constitutes a misdemeanor; I come, sir, in the name and as executor of the late Comtesse de Merret to beg that you will discon-

tinue your visits. One moment: I am not a Turk, and I have no wish to make a crime out of your action. Besides, it is not surprising that you should be ignorant of the circumstances that compel me to let the finest mansion in Vendôme fall to pieces. At the same time you seem, sir, to be a man of education, and you ought to know that a trespass on enclosed property is legally punishable. In the eye of the law a hedge is the same as a wall. To be sure, the condition into which the place has fallen serves as an excuse for your curiosity, and for my part I would ask nothing better than to allow you to visit it as often as you cared to, but, obliged as I am to observe the wishes of the testatrix, I have the honor to request that you will not enter the garden again. Since the will was read, I myself, sir, have never put my foot in the house; which, as I have already told you, forms part of Mme. de Merret's estate. I merely ascertained the number of doors and windows, so as to be prepared to pay the taxes, which duty I perform each year from funds which the late countess devised for that purpose. Ah, my dear sir, that will of hers made a great sensation in Vendôme !'

“At this point the old fellow stopped short and blew his nose. I had respected his loquacity, for I readily divined that Mme. de Merret’s will had been the chief event of his life, and that it had made his reputation, his fame, and his position. As I saw that thereafter I should be obliged to forego the pleasure of dreams and dramas, I was in consequence not unwilling to learn the truth in an official way. ‘Would it be indiscreet,’ I inquired, ‘to ask the reason of this eccentricity?’

“The notary looked at me with the complacent satisfaction of a man who is about to mount his hobby. He raised his collar with a little fatuous gesture, drew out his snuff-box, which he offered me, but which I declined, and helped himself to a luxurious pinch. He was radiant. The man who is without a hobby has never grasped the possibilities of life. A hobby is the happy medium between a passion and a monomania. For the first time I fully understood Sterne’s idea, and entered thoroughly into the joy with which, Trim assisting, Uncle Toby mounted his battle-horse.

“‘Of course, sir, you have heard in Paris of Roguin, the lawyer. No? That’s strange.

His firm became famous through a great failure. Well, I used to be senior clerk in his office, but as I was not rich enough to set up for myself in Paris, I came here and purchased the practice of my predecessor. I had relatives at Vendôme, among others a rich aunt whose daughter I married. Well, sir,' he continued after a slight pause, 'three months after I was admitted to the bar, I was summoned one evening — at that time I was unmarried — by the Comtesse de Merret to come to her château. Her maid, who is waitress in this inn to-day, came for me in her mistress's carriage. Ah! but there, I must tell you, in the first place, that two months before I came here the Comte de Merret went to Paris, where he died, after giving himself up to excesses of every kind. The day he went away his wife took all the furniture out of the "Grande Bretèche" and left the place. Some say she burned the furniture, the tapestries and all the objects of whatever kind, nature and description mentioned in this agreement, and leased by the party of the first part — Hello! what am I talking about? really, I beg your pardon, sir, I thought I was dictating a deed — that she burned them,' he continued, 'in the open

field at Merret. Did you ever go to Merret, sir? No? well, I can tell you it is a beautiful place. For the preceding three months,' he went on to say, 'the count and countess had been acting in a very queer manner. They received no one; the countess lived on the ground floor and the count on the one above. After the count went away, the countess was never seen except at church. Later on, at her château, she refused to see the friends and relatives that came to visit her. When she left the "Grande Bretèche" to go to Merret she was already very much changed. The dear woman, — I say dear because she gave me this diamond, but I only saw her once, — the dear lady was quite ill, too ill, I fancy, to have had any hope of recovery; indeed, she died without wishing to see a physician, and in consequence many of the ladies here thought that she was not altogether in her right mind. Of course, my curiosity was greatly excited when I learned that she was in need of my services. Nor was I the only one. That very evening, although it was quite late, everybody in the place knew that I was going to Merret. On the way there I got precious little information out of the

maid-servant: all she told me was that her mistress had received the last sacrament and was not expected to live through the night. It was eleven o'clock when I reached the château. I went up the broad stairway, and after passing through several dark, high-ceiled rooms, all of which were deucedly cold and damp, I was ushered into the grand bedroom where the countess lay. From all that I had heard about her, — and I had heard more than I could ever find time to repeat — I had taken her to be something of a coquette; but, if you will believe me, when I first looked at the bed on which she was lying I did n't see her. To be sure, the room was enormous, and the only light in it came from an old-fashioned argand lamp. The dust was so thick that it would have made you sneeze to look at it. But you have never been to Merret, have you? Well, sir, that bed was one of the kind they used to have in old times, with a great, high canopy of flowered calico. Near the bed was a table on which I noticed a copy of the "Imitation of Jesus Christ." I afterwards bought it, and the lamp too. Then there was an easy-chair for the maid, and two stools. That was all the furniture there

was. There was n't even a fire lighted. The whole thing would n't have taken ten lines in an inventory. Ah, my dear sir, if you had seen, as I did, that immense room hung with brown tapestries, you would have thought it a scene in a novel. It was glacial, and more than that—it was funereal. On nearing the bed, and after looking very hard, I at last caught sight of Mme. de Merret, but had it not been for the lamplight which fell directly on the pillows I might not have seen her at all. Her face was as yellow as wax, and looked like two hands joined in prayer. She wore a lace cap, and beneath it I could see that her long hair was pure white. When I approached she was sitting up, but it seemed to be difficult for her to do so. Her great black eyes, hollowed, I suppose by fever, and already dull, hardly moved at all. Her hands were well-nigh fleshless, and looked to me like bones in a thin covering of skin. I could see the bones and muscles perfectly. She must have been very beautiful, but at that moment she was frightful. The people who buried her said that they had never seen a human body so thin as hers. She was so wasted by sickness that she was nothing more than a phan-

tom. When she spoke to me her lips, which were of a pale violet hue, barely moved. As you can understand, my profession has familiarized me with the sight of suffering. Time and time and again I have stood at the bedside of the dying ; but I am free to confess that none of the families in tears, nor any of the death agonies I ever witnessed, have impressed me as did that woman, silent and alone in her great château. I did not hear the least sound : I did not even see that she was breathing. I stood before her, motionless, in a kind of stupor. Oh, I can see her now. At last her eyes turned toward me. She raised her hand, but it fell back again on the bed, and like a breath, — for, properly speaking, she had no voice left, — these words escaped her : " I have been impatient to see you." The effort was so great that her cheeks colored. " Madam," I said, but she motioned me to be silent, and thereupon her attendant came forward and whispered, " Be quiet : her ladyship can't bear the slightest noise. If you speak you will agitate her." I sat down. In a moment or two, Mme. de Merret, collecting what strength she had, moved her trembling hand under the bolster, let it lie there a while

and then made a final effort to withdraw it. In the mean time she had grasped a sealed paper. Drops of perspiration fell from her forehead. "This is my will," she said, "O Lord my God!" That was all. She seized a crucifix that was lying on her bed, raised it quickly to her lips, and died. The expression of her face makes me shiver when I think of it: her sufferings must have been hideous, but a look of joy came to her eyes and remained in them even after death. I took the will away with me, and when I opened it, I found that Mme. de Merret had made me her executor. Beyond a few bequests, she gave all her property to the hospital here in Vendôme. But the "*Grande Bretèche*" she disposed of in this wise: The house and grounds were to remain for fifty years, dating from the day of death, in the condition in which they might be at the time of her decease. She forbade any one to enter them under any pretext whatsoever, and left a sum of money for the pay of keepers, should they be necessary for the execution of her wishes. At the expiration of this term, provided the wishes of the testatrix have been observed, the house is to belong to my heirs, for, as you are doubtless

aware, a notary is incapacitated from receiving a legacy from a client. Otherwise the "Grande Bretèche" is to go over to whomsoever may have the best claim to it; but with the obligation of fulfilling the conditions indicated in a codicil annexed to the will, and which is not to be opened until the expiration of the said fifty years. The will has not been attacked, therefore' —

"The oblong notary did not finish his sentence. He looked at me with an air of triumph, and with a few compliments I managed to make his happiness complete.

" 'You have interested me so much,' I said by way of conclusion, 'that I can almost see that dying woman with her face paler than the sheets, and her dull terrifying eyes. I am sure I shall dream of her to-night. But, tell me, did n't you form any opinion about the will? Surely, you must have wondered over its eccentricity?'

"The notary assumed an air of reserve that was comical in the extreme. 'I never allow myself,' he answered, 'to judge the conduct of people who honor me with the gift of a diamond.'

"In spite of his scruples it did not take me long to loosen his tongue, and amid long

digressions I managed to gather from him the gist of Vendômiian gossip. But it was all so confused and contradictory that, in spite of the unfeigned interest which I took in the whole affair, I almost fell asleep. The dull monotony of his voice, which he had exercised in talking to clients or to himself, vanquished my curiosity. At last, however, he got up to go.

“ ‘I can tell you, sir,’ he said, when he reached the stairway, ‘I can tell you that there are a good many people who would like to see the end of the next forty years, but there ’ — and with a knowing wink he put his forefinger to his nose, as who should say, Mark this: to do so one must not be sixty now.

“Aroused from my apathy by this witicism, I closed the door, and then, drawing my chair before the fire, I began to lose myself in a Radcliffian romance which had constructed itself out of the notary’s recital, when the door, manœuvred by a light, feminine hand, turned on its hinges, and my hostess — a great, good-natured woman who had just missed her vocation, which was that of a Flemish peasant in a picture of Teniers — entered the room.

" ' Well, sir,' she said, ' M. Regnault has been telling you about the "Grande Bretèche," has n't he ?'

" I nodded.

" ' What did he say ?'

" In the fewest possible words I repeated to her Mme. de Merret's shadowy history. At each sentence I uttered she craned her neck and gazed at me with that innkeeper perspicacity which is the happy medium between the instinct of a spy and the shrewdness of a tradesman.

" ' But you,' I added, ' you seem to know much more about it than I do. Come, own up, Madame Lepas !'

" ' On the faith of an honest woman, just as true as my name is' —

" ' Don't perjure yourself. I can see a secret in your eyes. What sort of a man was this M. de Merret ?'

" ' Oh, as for M. de Merret, why, he was an elegant gentleman that you never saw the last of, he was so tall. He was from Picardy, and, as we say here, he had his head near his bonnet. He paid cash for everything so as not to have any arguments. You see, he was excitable. The ladies all liked him.'

“ ‘ Because he was excitable ? ’

“ ‘ I dare say. You see he must have had something about him to marry Mme. de Merret, who, not that I want to disparage any one else, was by far the prettiest and richest girl in Vendôme. She had something like twenty thousand francs a year. The whole town was at the wedding. The bride looked lovely, a real jewel of a woman. Ah, they made a fine couple ! ’

“ ‘ Were they happy together ? ’

“ ‘ Hum, well, yes and no ; so far as I know I suppose they were, but then as you can fancy the likes of me did n’t live with them cheek by jowl. Mme. de Merret was a nice little thing who had to put up with a great deal from her husband and his temper. She was proud too, but we all liked her. Bah, she had to be proud, I suppose : when you have a title ’ —

“ ‘ All the same there must have been some catastrophe to make them separate.’

“ ‘ I did n’t say there was a catastrophe. I don’t know anything about it.’

“ ‘ That’s right. I am positive now that you know the whole story.’

“ ‘ Well, sir, I will tell you what I do know. When I saw M. Regnault coming

to see you, I felt sure that in speaking of the "Grande Bretèche" he would talk about Mme. de Merret. That gave me the idea of asking your advice, for you have seemed to me to be a gentleman that would n't betray a poor woman who has never injured any one, and who, nevertheless, is tormented by her conscience. I have never said anything about it to any of my neighbors, for they are all iron-jawed gossips. Then, too, I have never had any one stop at the inn as long as you have; no one, I mean, to whom I could tell the story of the ten thousand francs.'

"'But see here,' I said, interrupting her flux of words, 'if your confidences are compromising, I would n't listen to them for all the world.'

"'Don't be frightened, you shall judge.'

"This eagerness on her part made it very clear that I was not the only one to whom my landlady had disclosed the secret of which I was to be the sole depositary.

"'When the emperor,' she went on to say, 'sent the Spanish prisoners here, I lodged, at the government's expense, a young Spaniard who had come to Vendôme on parole. In spite of his parole he went every day to show himself to the prefect.

He was a grandee — think of it! He had a name that ended in *os* and in *dia*, something like Bagos de Férédia. I wrote it on the book: you can see it if you want to. He was a handsome young fellow for a Spaniard, for all Spaniards, I hear, are ugly. He was n't more than five feet two, but he was well made. He had small hands, and you should have seen the way he took care of them. He had as many brushes for them as a lady has for her toilet. He had black hair and bright eyes. His complexion was rather dark, but it pleased me all the same. He wore the finest linen I have ever seen, although I have lodged princesses, and among others, General Bertrand, the Duke and Duchess d'Abrantès, M. Decazes and the King of Spain. He did n't eat much, but then he had such polite manners that no one could take offense. Oh, I liked him very much, although to be sure he did n't say four words a day, and it was impossible to have the least conversation with him. If any one spoke to him, he did n't answer. It was a trick, a way they all have, I hear. He read his breviary like a priest, and he went regularly to mass and all the services. Afterwards we remembered that he always

stood a step or two from Mme. de Merret's seat, but as he chose that place the first time he went to church, no one could say that it was intentional. Besides, poor young fellow, he never lifted his nose out of his prayer-book. In the evening he used to walk on the mountain, among the ruins of the Château: it reminded him of his country. In Spain, they say, it's all mountains. From the very first he came in late at night. It used to worry me when it got to be midnight and he had not returned, but after a while we got accustomed to his ways. He would take the key and let himself in when he chose. This went on for some time. One evening an ostler told us that while he had been bathing his horses he thought he saw the grandee swimming like a fish, far out in the river. When I saw him again I told him to be careful about the weeds, but he did n't seem to like it. He was vexed because he had been seen, I suppose. Finally, one day, or rather one morning, his room was empty and his bed had not been slept in. After looking all around I discovered a note in the drawer of his table, and with it fifty Spanish gold-pieces which all in all were worth about five thousand

francs, and also a sealed box with diamonds in it that were worth ten thousand more. The note said that in case he did not return the gold and diamonds were to be ours, provided we had masses said in thanksgiving for his safety and escape. My husband, who was living then, started off to look for him, and — this is the curious part of the whole affair — when he came back he brought with him the Spaniard's clothes. He had found them under a big stone on the bank of the river, almost opposite the "Grande Bretèche." After reading the letter he burned the clothes, and we said he had escaped. The sub-prefect put the gendarmes after him, but he never was caught. Lepas thought he was drowned, but I did n't. I thought he was in some way mixed up in Mme. de Merret's affair, the more so as Rosalie told me that the crucifix which her mistress was so fond of that she had it buried with her, was of ebony and silver, and when the Count Férédia first came here, he had one of ebony and silver too, but I never saw it with him but once. Now tell me, sir, ought I to have any remorse about the ten thousand francs, and aren't they honestly mine?'

" 'Certainly they are. But did n't you ever try to question Rosalie ? ' "

" ' Indeed I have, sir, but it was no use. She knows something, but what it is I can't for the life of me get out of her. ' "

" My hostess, after chatting a few moments more, went away, leaving me a prey to vague and shadowy thoughts, a romantic curiosity, and a species of terror such as grapples with him who enters at night a gloomy church where one faint flame glimmering afar through the lofty arches lights a dim figure passing so silently that nothing is heard save the indistinct rustle of a robe. The riotous weeds, condemned windows, rusty ironwork, closed doors and deserted rooms of the ' Grande Bretèche ' surged fantastically before me. I tried to penetrate its secret, and find the key to the solemn drama in which three people had perished.

" At once Rosalie became to me the most interesting person in Vendôme. Despite her brilliant health, I discovered traces in her face of some previous and prolonged emotion. There was about her something that suggested hope or remorse. Her attitude was as indicative of a secret as is that of a woman whose prayers are excessive, or the

infanticide whose ears are still ringing with her child's last cry. Yet therewithal she looked simple and commonplace, there was nothing of the criminal in her smile, and any one would have declared her innocent merely on account of the red and blue handkerchief that covered her vigorous bust, and the white and violet striped dress which set off her shapely figure. 'No,' I said reflectively, 'no, I won't leave Vendôme until I have gotten to the bottom of this matter; if there is no other way I'll make love to Rosalie.' One evening I called to her: 'Rosalie!'

"'Beg pardon, sir?'

"'You are not married, are you?'

"'Oh,' she answered, laughing, 'if I ever want to be unhappy it won't be for want of a man to help me.'

"'You are certainly too appetizing to lack opportunities. But tell me, Rosalie, what made you come here after Mme. de Merret's death? Did n't she leave you anything?'

"'Indeed she did, but my place here is the best in Vendôme.' This answer was one of those that judges and lawyers term dilatory. Now the position which Rosalie occupied in the history of the 'Grande Bretèche' was in my mind analogous to that of the

square in the middle of the chessboard,— she was at the centre of the interest and truth, she was knotted in the knot. With her, therefore, it was not a case of ordinary love-making. She represented nothing more nor less than the last chapter of a novel. Consequently from that moment she became the object of my predilection. After studying her for some time I noticed in her, as in the case of all other women that occupy our thoughts, a number of good qualities. She was neat and quick; that she was good-looking goes without the telling; in a word, she possessed every one of those attractions which an inflammable imagination lends to a woman, no matter in what situation she may be.

"One evening, a fortnight after the notary's visit, I said to her abruptly, 'Tell me all you know about Mme. de Merret.'

"At once she changed color; her eyes lost their innocent brilliance. 'Don't ask me that,' she answered with a shudder. But as I insisted, 'Well,' she continued, 'if you will have it, I'll tell you, but do keep it a secret.'

"'Make yourself easy on that score,' I replied, 'I give you the word of a robber, which is the safest in the world.'

“ ‘If it is the same to you, I prefer your own.’ Thereupon she adjusted her kerchief and assumed a proper position, — for there is for every narrative an attitude of confidence and security. Indeed, when standing, or when on an empty stomach, it is impossible to tell a story well. The best ones are told at a particular hour, such, for instance, as the present one, when we all are at table. As, however, it would take forever for me to repeat all of Rosalie’s wordy eloquence, and, moreover, as the occurrence of which she gave me a confused idea takes an exact position between the gossip of the notary and that of my landlady, I will tell it to you in my own way as briefly as possible.

“ The room which Mme. de Merret occupied at the ‘Grande Bretèche’ was situated on the ground floor. The wardrobe she used was a little closet about four feet deep, which had been built into the wall. Three months previous to the particular evening of which I am to tell you, Mme. de Merret had been so ill that her husband had removed to the floor above. Through some one of those fortuitous circumstances that can never be foreseen, M. de Merret, on this particular evening, returned from his club fully two

hours later than he was accustomed to do. His wife thought him at home, in bed and asleep. The invasion of France, however, had been hotly discussed, he had gotten excited over a game of billiards, and he had lost forty francs, — an enormous sum at Vendôme, where every one is niggardly. For some time past M. de Merret had contented himself with asking Rosalie if his wife were asleep, whereupon, — her answer being always in the affirmative, — he had gone to his own room with that easy indifference that is born of habit and confidence. But on this evening he decided to see Mme. de Merret and tell her of his misadventure. It may be that he hoped she would console him. At dinner he had noticed that she was particularly well-dressed. On his way home from the club he told himself that his wife was better, that convalescence had improved her looks, — a circumstance which after the fashion of husbands he had been a little late in perceiving. Instead, therefore, of calling Rosalie, who happened to be in the kitchen watching the cook and coachman play cards, M. de Merret went directly to his wife's room. His step, which was easy to recognize, echoed through the arches of the cor-

ridor. Just as he was on the point of entering the room, he thought he heard some one shut the closet door, but on going in, he found his wife standing alone before the fire. At first he fancied, innocently enough, that Rosalie was in the closet; but suddenly, with abrupt suspicion, he looked at his wife's face. The expression which it wore was vaguely suggestive of excitement and anxiety.

“‘You are late,’ she said. Her voice, ordinarily clear and musical, seemed to him somewhat troubled. He made no answer, for at that moment Rosalie entered. His wonderment deepened. With his arms crossed before him, he paced mechanically up and down the room, going from one window to the other.

“‘Have you heard any bad news? Are you ill?’ his wife asked timidly, while Rosalie was helping her to undress. Still he made no answer.

“‘You may go,’ Mme. de Merret said to her maid. ‘I will do my hair myself.’ Her husband's face showed clearly that something had gone wrong, and she wished to be alone with him.

“When Rosalie had gone, or was supposed to have gone, — for as a matter of fact

she lingered in the corridor, — M. de Merret stepped forward to where his wife stood, looked straight at her, and said coldly, 'Madam, there is some one in that closet.'

"She returned his gaze calmly, and said with an air of candor, 'No, there is no one.'

"To M. de Merret this reply was an added torture. He did not believe it, and yet his wife had never seemed purer and more innocent than she did at that moment. Nevertheless he made a movement as though to open the closet. Mme. de Merret caught his hand, looked sadly at him and said in a voice that was singularly touching: 'If you find no one, remember that all will be at an end between us.'

"The supreme dignity of her attitude inspired her husband with a renewed respect for her, and brought to him at the same time one of those ideas which need only a vaster theatre to become immortal. 'No,' he said, 'I will not open it. In either case we would be separated forever. Listen: I know the purity of your heart, I know that you lead the life of a saint, and I am positive that you would not commit a sin at the expense of your soul.' At these words Mme. de Merret's face grew haggard. 'Look, here is

your crucifix,' he added; 'now swear, swear before God, that there is no one there. I will believe you, and I will not open that door.'

"Mme. de Merret took the crucifix and said, 'I swear it.'

"'Louder,' said her husband, 'and repeat after me. I swear before God that there is no one in that closet.'

She repeated the words without embarrassment.

"'That will do,' said M. de Merret, coldly. Then, after a momentary silence, during which he curiously examined the crucifix, which was of ebony incrustated with silver, he added, 'That's a fine thing of yours: I never saw it before.'

"'I found it at Duvivier's; when the prisoners passed through Vendôme last year, he bought it of a Spaniard.'

"'Did he? Indeed!' M. de Merret replaced the crucifix on its stand and rang the bell. When Rosalie appeared a moment later, M. de Merret led her quickly to the embrasure of a window, and whispered: 'I know that Gorenflot wants to marry you; poverty alone has prevented him; you told him you would not be his wife until he was

a master mason. Now run and look for him; tell him to come here and bring his trowel; he will be richer than you ever hoped he could be. But mind this, — on your way out, say nothing, otherwise' — He looked at her in a significant way.

"Rosalie started to go. He called her back. 'Here, take my pass-key.' Then in a thundering voice he called through the corridor, 'Jean!'

"Jean, who was both valet and coachman, left his cards and came. His master motioned to him to come nearer. 'Go to bed, all of you,' he said; then in a whisper he added, 'When they are all asleep, — *asleep*, do you hear? — come and tell me.'

"After giving these orders, M. de Merret, who meanwhile had not lost sight of his wife, came quietly to the fire where she stood and began to tell her about his game of billiards and the discussion at the club. When Rosalie returned she found them chatting in the friendliest way.

"Some time before, M. de Merret had caused fresh ceilings to be put throughout that part of the ground floor which was used for reception rooms. Now plaster is not to be had in Vendôme, and the cost of importing it

makes it expensive. Knowing that there would always be purchasers for it, M. de Merret had consequently ordered a large quantity. This circumstance suggested the plan which he then began to execute.

“ ‘Gorenflot is there, sir,’ said Rosalie in an undertone.

“ ‘Show him in,’ he answered.

“ When Mme. de Merret saw the mason she turned pale.

“ ‘Gorenflot,’ said M. de Merret, ‘go to the stable and get some bricks ; get enough to wall up the door of that closet ; you ’ll find plenty of plaster.’ Then drawing Rosalie and the mason aside, he addressed Gorenflot in a whisper : ‘ You sleep here to-night, but to-morrow you shall have a passport to a town in a foreign country. I will give you six thousand francs for your expenses. You must stay away ten years : if you don’t like the town you go to, you can choose another, provided it is in the same country. First go to Paris, and wait for me there. In Paris I will give you a paper that will insure you six thousand francs more, — when the bargain is completed. In return for this you must never lisp a word of what you do here to-night. As for you, Rosalie, you shall

have ten thousand francs the day you are married to Gorenflot, but to have them you must hold your tongue. Otherwise, not a penny !'

" 'Rosalie,' said Mme. de Merret, 'come and do my hair.'

"Her husband walked calmly up and down, watching his wife, the mason and the door, but he did so in an unsuspecting and natural manner.

"Gorenflot was obliged to make a certain amount of noise : once, when he was putting down a hod of bricks, while the count happened to be at the other end of the room, Mme. de Merret seized the opportunity to say to Rosalie, 'A thousand francs a year for you, if you manage to tell Gorenflot to leave a crevice at the bottom ;' then raising her voice, she said with an air of utter indifference, 'Go and help him.'

"During the entire time that Gorenflot took to wall up the door, the count and countess sat in silence. On the husband's part the silence was intentional, on that of the wife it was pride. When the wall was half done, the mason, seeing M. de Merret's back turned, took the opportunity to break one of the two panes of glass that were in the door. This incident proved to Mme. de

Merret that Rosalie had spoken to Gorenflot. All three then saw a man's face, sombre, dark, with black hair and glistening eyes. Before her husband turned the poor woman had the time to make a gesture to him which signified, Hope.

"At four o'clock, toward sunrise, — for it was then September, — the construction was finished. The mason was put under Jean's care and M. de Merret slept in his wife's room.

"That morning on arising he said carelessly: 'By the way, I must go to the mayor's for the passport.' He put his hat on, took three steps toward the door, turned back and took the crucifix. His wife trembled with joy. 'He is going to Duvivier's too,' she thought. As soon as her husband had gone, she called to Rosalie. 'Quick!' she cried, 'a pickaxe! I saw how Gorenflot worked: we will have time to make an opening and fill it up again.'

"In a trice Rosalie had brought the tool to her mistress, who at once began to tear down the wall. She had already knocked out several bricks, when, turning in an effort to strike a harder blow, she saw M. de Merret behind her, and fell fainting to the ground.

"‘Put her in bed,’ said her husband, coldly. Foreseeing what would happen in his absence, he had laid a trap for his wife: he had simply written to the mayor and sent for Duvivier. The jeweler arrived when the room was once more in order.

"‘Duvivier,’ he asked, ‘did you buy a crucifix of a Spaniard who passed through here?’

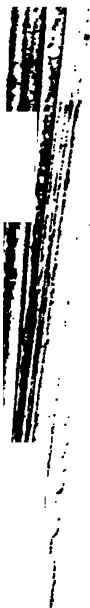
"‘No, sir.’

"‘Very good. I am obliged to you,’ and M. de Merret gave his wife the look of a tiger. ‘Jean,’ he added, turning to the valet, ‘hereafter you will serve my food here. Mme. de Merret is ill: I shall not leave her until she has recovered.’

"‘Twenty days he stayed in his wife’s room. At first, when some noise or other came from the walled closet and his wife attempted to plead for the dying stranger, without even permitting her to say a word, he would answer, ‘You swore on the cross that there was no one there.’”

After this story, all the ladies left the table, and the charm in which Bianchon had held them was broken. Nevertheless a few of them had felt a cold shiver run down their backs when they heard his last words.

MADAME DE BEAUSÉANT.



MADAME DE BEAUSÉANT.

IN the spring of 1822 a young man, recovering from an illness caused by dissipation or over-study, was sent to Normandy to recuperate. His convalescence necessitated complete rest, simple food, bracing air and an entire absence of excitement. The rich Bessin fields and the monotony of provincial life seemed, therefore, the very best things for him.

He went to Bayeux, a charming little town a mile or two from the sea, where he was welcomed by a cousin, Mme. de Sainte-Sevère, who greeted him with the cordiality peculiar to those who live far from the world, and to whom the advent of a friend or relative is little else than a godsend.

Beyond the difference of a custom or two, one small town is precisely like another. When, therefore, the young Parisian, Baron Gaston de Nueil by name, had passed half

a dozen evenings with his cousin and her friends, he found himself acquainted with every one whom the exclusive society of Bayeux regarded as being worth knowing. In that little world, where etiquette was rigorously observed, where patrician and territorial claims were quoted like stocks on the exchange, the young man no sooner appeared than he was weighed in the infallible scales of concentrated opinion. His cousin had already told what he was worth and what he would have in the future. She exhibited his family tree, boasted of his acquaintances and praised his manners. He had eighteen thousand francs a year, and sooner or later he would inherit the Château of Manerville, together with all its dependencies. The baron was therefore well received, but, as he was only twenty-three, no particular attention was paid to him save by a few designing mammas.

The society thus opened to him amused him at first not a little. He sketched the members in a mental album. Angularities, wrinkles, costumes, habits, opinions, were all put down. Their Normanisms delighted him, and he noted with interest the nullity of their minds and characters.

But soon his enjoyment waned. The existence into which he had been plunged was too much like that of a squirrel in a cage; the life he led was as lacking in contrast as is a monk's, and it was not long before he fell into a state which, without being either one of boredom or disgust, resembled them astonishingly in its effects. When the sufferings of a transition period, such as this, are over and done with, the individual on whom they have operated finds himself transplanted to a soil where he will gradually shrivel up. Indeed, if he is not removed, little by little he will adapt himself to his surroundings and become accustomed to the void that circles and annihilates him. Gaston's lungs had already grown accustomed to the new atmosphere. The days that passed unmarked, yet ordered, brought to him the happiness of a plant; he began to lose all recollection of the movement and constant fructifying of thought which had made Paris so delicious to him; he was about to become fossilized among fossils, and, like another companion of Ulysses, to loll forever where he was, content with stupid ease. One evening at a card-party, where sixteen people were chatting together, he found himself

seated between an old lady and one of the vicar-generals of the diocese. There, thinking of nothing in particular and wholly engaged in digesting one of those exquisite dinners which form the chief event of provincial days, he began to discover an unwritten philosophy in the uniform movement of life that runs in a circle; he began to appreciate the calm that is found in logical customs, and to feel the futility of Parisian elegance. Paris, with her passions, her storms, and her pleasures, was as vague as a memory of childhood. Indeed, he might have been irrevocably done for had it not been for a phrase which fell upon his ear like an original strain in a tedious opera.

"Did n't you go yesterday to call on Mme. de Beauséant?" an old lady asked, addressing herself to the foremost noble of the land.

"I did so this morning," he answered. "She was so sad and ailing that I could not get her to say that she would dine with us to-morrow."

"With Mme. de Champignelles?" the dowager exclaimed with an air of surprise.

"With my wife," he answered tranquilly.

"Is n't Mme. de Beauséant of the House of Burgundy? Through her mother, it is true, but an ancestry such as that whitens anything. My wife is very fond of the viscountess, and the poor woman has been alone so long that" —

As he said this the Marquis de Champignelles looked coldly at the people who were listening to him, but it was impossible to tell whether he wished to make concessions to Mme. de Beauséant because of her misfortune or because of her rank; whether he was flattered to receive her, or whether, as a matter of pride, he wanted to force others to receive her too.

The ladies looked inquiringly at one another. During the deep silence that followed, the attitude which they assumed was taken as a mark of disapprobation.

"Is this Mme. de Beauséant the one whose adventure with M. d'Ajuda-Pinto was so much talked about?"¹ Gaston asked of the person who sat next to him.

"The very same. She came here after the marriage of the Marquis d'Ajuda, and took the villa Courcelles, but no one re-

¹ The reader is referred to *Le Père Goriot*. [Translator's note.]

ceives her. She is too sensible not to understand what her position is, and she has made no attempt to see any one. M. de Champignelles and some few other men have called on her, but he is the only one she has admitted. They are related, you know, through the Beauséants. The old Marquis de Beauséant married a Champignelles. Although Mme. de Beauséant descends from the House of Burgundy, you can readily understand that it is impossible for us to admit into our circle a woman who is separated from her husband. It is one of the old-fashioned ideas to which we still cling" —

M. de Nueil heard his neighbor's voice, but he no longer listened to it. He was lost in a thousand fancies. Fancies they were, for is there any other term capable of expressing the allurements of an adventure which, so soon as it pervades the imagination, excites the mind with the hopes, fears and presentiments of inexplicable delights, and this although as yet there is nothing on which the caprices of the imagination can feed or alight. Under such conditions, thought conceives impossible projects, and provides the germ that may blossom into

love, precisely as a seed holds the perfume and color of a rose. A moment before, M. de Nueil was unaware that Mme. de Beauséant had fled to Normandy, but he knew that she had been recently enveloped in one of those scandals which women either envy or condemn, particularly when the seductions of youth and beauty go far to justify the fault which caused it.

To celebrity, however acquired, there attaches a singular fascination. Indeed it would seem that with women, as formerly with families, the glory of a crime effaced the shame. As certain families boast of decapitated ancestors, so does a handsome woman become more attractive through the renown of a happy love affair or a terrible betrayal. We are pitiless only to vulgar sentiments and commonplace adventures. In attracting the eyes of others we add to our stature, and it is undeniable that the generality of people experience a sentiment of respect for any one who has gotten above them, no matter how the success has been achieved.

Gaston de Nueil felt himself attracted to Mme. de Beauséant either through an influence of this description, or else through mere curiosity, the desire to lend an interest to

his life — in brief, through that conglomeration of motives which it is impossible to describe, and for which the word *Fatality* is usually employed. She surged suddenly before him like a new world — a world where there was much to hope for, and much to fear. He felt how great the contrast must be between her and the people he saw about him. Then, too, she was a woman, and in Bayeux he had met only females. In short, she awoke in his heart the remembrance of younger dreams, and of passions that were sleeping. During the rest of the evening he was absent-minded. He tried to plan some way of meeting her, and failed miserably. She had the reputation of being very clever; and while clever people can seldom resist originality, yet at the same time they are exacting, and hard to hoodwink. The difficult enterprise of pleasing is by them made doubly difficult. The chances of failure are as great as the chances of success. Besides, beyond the pride which her position imposed upon her, the viscountess was doubtless obliged to keep up the dignity of her name. The solitude in which she lived was the least of the barriers about her. It was, therefore, well-nigh impossible for a stranger,

however well connected he might be, to be admitted to her house.

In spite of this, M. de Nueil the next morning walked several times about Courcelles. A dupe to the illusions of youth, he looked through the cracks in the gates, and over the surrounding walls. The closed blinds interested him even more than those that were open. Vainly he racked his brain in an effort to find some way of being admitted. For several mornings he took the same walk, and each day his thoughts became more occupied with the victim to love who was buried there in her solitude. His heart therefore thrilled with hope whenever, in passing along the wall, he happened to hear the heavy tramp of the gardener.

Naturally he thought of writing; but what can a man say to a woman whom he does not know, and who does not know him? Besides, he was not sure of himself, and moreover, like all young men whose illusions have not been dispersed, he preferred death to a contemptuous silence, and shuddered when he thought of the chance his first love-letter would run of being tossed into the fire. He was a prey to a thousand conflicting ideas. At last, however, by dint of

conceiving dramas and inventing chimeras, he happened upon one of those lucky stratagems that are to be met with among the great number on which the imagination has been at work, and which show, even to the most innocent of her sex, how much a man has thought of her.

It not infrequently occurs that the vagaries of society create as many real obstacles between a woman and her lover as the Oriental poets have placed in their delicious fictions. In life, then, as in fairy-land, a woman should belong to him who has found a way to approach and deliver her from the languors of her situation.

Now the humblest wight that ever fell in love with a caliph's daughter was as near to the object of his affection as Gaston was to Mme. de Beauséant.

The viscountess, meanwhile, lived in entire ignorance of the plans that were being mapped out around her. M. de Nueil, whose love increased in proportion to the obstacles that he encountered, and who had dowered her with every one of the attractions that distant things invariably possess, concluded at last that he must rely solely on his inspiration, and trust everything to the love which

glistened in his eyes. Believing also that speech is more eloquent than the most passionate epistle, and speculating, too, on the curiosity which is natural to woman, he went one fine day to M. de Champignelles, and begged him, so soon as an opportunity presented itself, to ask Mme. de Beauséant whether she would consent to receive the bearer of an important and delicate commission. In case Mme. de Beauséant refused, he further requested that the marquis would say nothing of the matter to any one. At the same time he urged him to leave nothing unsaid that might influence her decision. Was he not a man of honor? a man incapable of an impropriety or even of a breach of good taste?

The haughty nobleman, whose little vanities were flattered, was completely duped by the diplomacy of love which lends to youth the *aplomb* and shrewdness of an old ambassador. He tried, indeed, to find out what the commission was, but Gaston, who had the best of reasons for holding his tongue, eluded his questions and finally got complimented on his discretion.

Immediately afterwards the marquis hurried to Courcelles with all the zeal of a man

who is anxious to be of service to a pretty woman. In the position in which Mme. Beauséant was placed, a message such as his was one quite apt to excite her interest. Therefore, although she did not remember ever to have heard of M. de Nueil, she still saw no reason why she should not receive him, especially after she had made a few prudent inquiries. At first, however, she refused; then, after discussing with M. de Champignelles the propriety of her so doing, and after questioning him to see whether he knew the object of the visit, she consented. The discussion, joined to the marquis's obligatory discretion, had irritated her curiosity.

When Gaston heard that he could see the viscountess he was at once intoxicated and embarrassed, — intoxicated at the prompt realization of his wish and embarrassed in his attempt to find a climax worthy of his ruse. "Bah! let me but see her," he kept repeating to himself while he was dressing; "to see her is everything." It was to his mother-wit that he left the duty of furnishing him at the proper time with an expedient which would undo the Gordian knot in which he had gotten himself entangled. For Gaston was one of those people who

go straight ahead, and at the last moment, when face to face with danger, summon unexpected forces to their assistance.

Unaware of the fact that youth is a charm and an attraction in itself, he paid, meanwhile, particular attention to his toilet. He fancied, as do most young men, that success depends on the order or disorder of a lock of hair. Superior women, however, such as Mme. de Beauséant, never allow themselves to be charmed by graces other than those of the mind and disposition. A strong character flatters their vanity, — it promises much and admits of the exactions of the heart. As for wit, it amuses them ; it replies to the delicacies of their nature ; it makes them feel that they have been understood. And after all, what do women want if not to be amused, understood or adored ?

M. de Nueil had in mind, in person, and in manner, that innocent originality which lends a savor even to the commonplace. He was well-read, clever, and his face was as pleasing as his heart was impressionable. In his eyes there was a passion and a tenderness which was as sincere as it was natural. The resolution which he came to on entering Courcelles was therefore in harmony with

the frankness of his character and the ardor of his imagination. But in spite of the intrepidity of his love he was unable to quell a violent palpitation when a lackey, after asking his name, disappeared, and then, returning to usher him in, held a door open and gravely announced him.

Gaston entered slowly, but with ease, — a thing more difficult in a room where there is one woman than in one where there are twenty. At the angle of the hearth, in which, in spite of the season, a bright fire was burning, he saw a lady, young and perfectly dressed, sitting in a high-backed arm-chair. She was in the act of putting down on a table near her a book which she had been reading, but having at the same moment turned to look at M. de Nueil, the book slipped and fell to the floor. Without appearing to notice it, she drew back and bowed to the young man, but so slightly that the inclination of her head was barely perceptible. Then, bending forward, she stirred the fire, picked up a glove, which she drew on her left hand, gave a momentary glance in search of the other, and with her right hand, which was pale, transparent and ringless, motioned Gaston to a seat before

her. When her guest was seated she turned to him with a movement that was delicately interrogatory. All these little things were done in so graceful a manner that Gaston was captivated at once. For that matter, Mme. de Beauséant contrasted so strikingly with the automatonis by whom he had been surrounded for the past two months that she seemed the very personification of his dreams. She was fair-skinned and blonde, yet her eyes were dark. Her forehead was that of a fallen angel proud of her fault and careless of pardon ; about it, her luxuriant hair was arranged in such an opulent fashion that it was easy to fancy it surmounted by the ducal crown of Burgundy. In her eyes was the courage of her race, joined to the tenderness of a woman.

It was little else than an imposing spectacle to see, in the great silent room, a woman such as she, who was separated from the entire world, — a woman who for three years had lived alone with the memories of brilliant and passionate days that had been filled with festivals and constant homages, but who now was left to the horrors of the uneventful. Neither wife nor mother, cast out by society, deprived of the only heart

that could make her own beat without shame, unable to turn to any one for the aid that was necessary to her troubled spirit, obliged to rely solely on her own strength and forbidden any other hope than that of death, destined for happiness and yet condemned to die without meeting it, without giving it, and she a woman! Ah, it was more than cruel.

Through Gaston's mind these thoughts passed like a flash. In the presence of the poetry with which she was enveloped he felt not a little ashamed of himself. Overcome by the triple brilliance of beauty, misfortune, and nobility, he sat dreaming with eyes wide open, admiring the woman and yet not knowing what to say to her.

Mme. de Beauséant was not altogether displeased by this dumb compliment. She called a smile to her lips and said, "M. de Champignelles has told me that you had kindly consented to be the bearer of a message. Can it be?" —

On hearing these terrible words Gaston felt the absurdity of his position, and saw too the poor taste and disloyalty of which he had been guilty. He blushed; his confusion was so great that he almost lost his presence

of mind ; but suddenly, by the exercise of that force which youth can draw from the knowledge of its faults, he recovered his self-possession, and, interrupting Mme. de Beauséant with a submissive gesture, said to her, "Madam, I do not deserve the happiness of being here : I have deceived you. The sentiment that I have obeyed, however great it may be, cannot excuse the miserable subterfuge which I have employed. But if you will allow me to explain " —

The viscountess gave him one sudden look of contempt, raised her hand to the bell-rope and rang : in a moment a servant appeared ; then, turning with dignity, she said, " Jacques, show this gentleman to the door."

She rose, bowed, and stooped to pick up her book. Her movements were as chill and mechanical as they had been graceful and indulgent before. M. de Nueil rose also, but he remained standing. Noticing this, Mme. de Beauséant looked at him again in a way which said more plainly than words, Are you not going ?

Her eyes were so mocking that Gaston turned white as a sheet. He felt the tears rising, but he forced them back and re-

turned Mme. de Beauséant's gaze with a look expressive both of pride and resignation. The viscountess had the right to punish him, but did she need to do so? Then he went out. As he crossed the vestibule, he saw the danger of his position. "If I leave the house," he told himself, "I can never come back. The viscountess will always think me a fool. It is impossible that she has not already guessed my feelings toward her; as it is, she is probably sorry now that she dismissed me so abruptly, but there is no way in which she can revoke her decree. It is for me to understand that."

At this idea, Gaston stopped short, uttered an exclamation, turned quickly about, said, "I have forgotten something," and returned to the drawing-room, followed by Jacques, who, full of respect for a baron and the sacred rights of property, was completely deceived by the innocent tone in which the words were spoken.

Gaston entered without being announced. When the viscountess, thinking doubtless that the intruder was a domestic, raised her eyes, she found M. de Nueil before her.

"Jacques showed me to the door," he said, smiling, but the smile was such a sad

one that it took from his words any appearance of having been said in jest.

Mme. de Beauséant was disarmed.

"Sit down, then," she said.

Gaston grasped a chair with a movement that was little less than avaricious. His eyes were so full of happiness that the viscountess could not sustain their gaze, and she looked away, inwardly enjoying the pleasure of being admired, — a pleasure which in woman is ever renascent. Besides, she had been understood, and where is the woman who is not grateful to him who divines her logical vagaries, and can coördinate their contradictions?

"Madam," Gaston murmured, "you know my guilt, but not my crimes. If you knew with what happiness I" —

"Ah, take care!" she said, lifting a finger with a warning gesture, while with the other hand she made a movement as though to ring the bell.

This graceful little threat apparently evoked some memory of happier days, for her face took on an expression of sadness. Gravely, and yet not coldly, she looked at M. de Nueil, and said, with an air of being profoundly impressed with the wisdom

of her words: "All this is very absurd. There was a time when I had the right to be gay, when I could have laughed with you and received you without fear, but to-day my life is entirely changed. I am not the mistress of my actions: I am obliged to reflect. To what do I owe your visit? Is it curiosity? In that case I pay very dear for a moment's pleasure. Are you already wildly in love with a woman infallibly calumniated and whom you never saw before? If so, your sentiments are due to an error I committed and which chance made public."

She threw her book aside impatiently.

"Because I have been weak, does the world suppose that I must be so always? It is hideous, degrading. Do you come to pity me? You are very young to be able to sympathize; besides, I prefer contempt to pity. I wish no one's compassion."

There was a moment of silence.

"You see," she continued sadly, "whatever may be the reason of your visit, it is simply an added wound. You are too young to be utterly hard-hearted, and I am sure you see the impropriety of what you have done. I forgive you, and speak of it without resentment. But you will not come back,

will you? I beg where I could command. If you come again, neither you nor I would be able to prevent the whole town from thinking that you were my lover. You would mark another misfortune on a list already long, and such, I assume, is not your wish."

"I have been wrong," he answered, "very wrong. I understand thoroughly that I should not have attempted to see you; and yet my wish to do so was very natural" —

In words that were more sincere than graphic, he tried to picture the sufferings to which exile had condemned him. He described the condition of a young man to whom love is a necessity and yet who had never known its intoxication. He explained his fault without attempting to justify it. He flattered his hostess in proving to her that she realized the dream of his manhood. Then, in alluding to his morning walks about Courcelles, and the vagabond fancies which had pursued him at the sight of the house which at last he had entered, he managed to arouse that indefinable indulgence which a woman always finds in her heart for the follies she inspires. Mme. de Beauséant had been too long deprived of emotions that come of well-turned sincerity

to be entirely insensible to its pleasures. She could not help looking at the young man and admiring his candor, which worldly wisdom had not routed, and ambition had not destroyed. In this way, unknown to one another, each was making reflections that were most inimical to their peace of mind.

M. de Nueil recognized in the viscountess one of those rare women who are the victims of their own perfection and inextinguishable tenderness; in short, one of those women whose beauty is the least of their charms. In him, meanwhile, the viscountess saw a realized ideal, — a man in whom the egotism of fortune and family had not penetrated, and who was unaffected by that personal sentiment which ends by nipping devotion, honor and abnegation in the bud.

Once started on the broad fields of sentiment, they went very far in theory, mentally weighing each other as they advanced, and comparing their different impressions. This examination, involuntary on Gaston's part, was premeditated by the viscountess, who, making use of her natural ability, expressed opinions contrary to those she really held, so as to learn those of her guest. She was so bright and graceful, she was so *herself*, that

the young man, struck by some delicious idea which she expressed, exclaimed naively, "Ah, madam, how could a man ever have deserted you !"

Mme. de Beauséant was struck dumb. Gaston blushed ; he thought he had offended her. But the pleasure she experienced was the first real one that had been accorded to her since the day of her misfortune. The cleverest *roué* could not have made greater progress than M. de Nueil won with that cry which his heart had dictated.

Coming as it did from the candor of youth, this verdict acquitted the viscountess in her own eyes : it condemned the world, accused him who had forsaken her, and justified the solitude in which she languished. The world's absolution, social esteem and friendly sympathy, so long desired and so cruelly refused, — in short, her most secret wishes were fulfilled by that one exclamation. At last she was understood ! M. de Nueil had given her the chance to rise superior to her fall.

She glanced at the clock.

"Oh, madam !" Gaston exclaimed, "do not punish me for my thoughtlessness ; if you give me but one evening, do not send me away so soon."

She smiled at the compliment.

"But," she said, "as we are not to see each other again, what matters a moment more or less? If you were to like me it would be a misfortune."

"A misfortune that has already occurred," he answered sadly.

"Don't say that," she said. "Were I in any other position, I would be glad to have you come. I will speak plainly to you, and you will see why I cannot, why I should not, see you. I think you are too refined not to feel that were I even suspected of a second fault, I should become, in the eyes of every one, a contemptible and ordinary woman. I would be like any other. On the other hand, a pure and spotless life will heighten my character. I am too proud not to try to live in the midst of society like a being apart, a victim to its laws through my marriage, a victim to man through my affection. If I did not remain faithful to my position, I would deserve all the blame I have received, and I would lose my self-esteem. I have been unable to acquire that social virtue of belonging to a man whom I did not love. In spite of the laws, I have broken the bonds of marriage. It was wrong, it was criminal,

it was anything you like, but my condition was equivalent to death. I wanted to live. Had I been a mother, perhaps I should have found strength enough to support the tortures of my union with a man who was forced upon me. When a girl is but eighteen she hardly knows what she is being forced to do. I have violated the laws of the world: the world has punished me. We have been just to each other. I sought happiness. Is not happiness a law of woman's nature? I was young, I was beautiful. . . . I thought I met some one who was as loving as he appeared impassioned. He loved me — for a moment!"

She paused.

"I had thought," she continued, "that a man should never desert a woman in such a situation as was mine, but as I was deserted, I must have ceased to please. Yes, I must have done something, — I must have been too loving, too devoted, or too exacting. Misfortune has made it clear to me. After having been a long time the accuser, I am content to be the criminal. At my own expense, therefore, I have absolved him who I thought had wronged me. I was not adroit enough to preserve his affection, and fate has

punished me for my awkwardness. My sufferings have taught me not to expose myself again. I do not understand how it is that I am still alive after having suffered as I did. Indeed, it has taken me three years to gain strength enough to speak of it at all. Agony usually ends with death, and mine, mine was an agony without the tomb for climax. Ah, how I suffered ! ”

The viscountess raised her great eyes to the cornice, to which she doubtless confided all that she could not repeat to a stranger. A cornice is the sweetest, the most submissive, the most indulgent confidant that a woman can find when she does not dare to look her interlocutor in the face. The cornice of a boudoir is an institution. It is a confessional, minus the priest. At this moment Mme. de Beauséant was both eloquent and beautiful, one might even say flirtatious, were not the word too strong. In according justice to herself, in throwing the highest barriers between herself and love, she stimulated all the sentiments of man, and the further away she placed the goal, the more clearly did she let its value be seen. At last she lowered her eyes to Gaston, and said calmly, —

“Acknowledge that it is my duty to remain in solitude.”

M. de Nueil felt a violent desire to throw himself at the feet of this woman, sublime in her folly and good-sense, but the dread of appearing ridiculous held him back. He suppressed, therefore, both his exaltation and his thoughts; he feared that he would not be able to express himself properly, and, at the same time, the dread of an abrupt refusal or a derisive smile combined to quell his ardor. The reaction of the sentiments which he was obliged to repel at the very moment that they sprang into being, produced that sensation of restless pain which visits the timid and the ambitious alike. Nevertheless he felt constrained to speak. “Permit me, madam,” — and his voice trembled as he spoke, — “permit me to tell you how I have been impressed and emotionalized by your words. You have shown me new horizons: if I have a desire it is to make you forget your sorrows, to efface with my love the wounds you have received from others. This effusion of mine is sudden, I admit: to-day there is nothing to justify it, and I should perhaps ” —

“Not another word,” said Mme. de Beau-

séant; "we have both gone too far. I have tried to explain as best I might why it is that I cannot see you, but I have not sought for any compliments or demonstrations. An effort of that kind would be becoming only in a woman who is happy. Believe me now, it is best that we should remain strangers to one another. Later you will understand that bonds which some day must be sundered should never be woven."

She sighed, and for a moment slightly contracted her forehead.

"Think how a woman must suffer," she continued, "at being unable to follow the man whom she loves in each of the phases of his life; her grief must even affect him, and the pain is increased."

There was a moment of silence, after which she said, with a smile, as she rose to dismiss her guest: "In coming to see me you hardly expected to hear a sermon, did you?" At that moment Gaston felt that this extraordinary woman was further from him than ever before. Attributing the charm which she had exerted to a feminine desire to make display of her wit, he bowed coldly and withdrew.

On his way home the baron tried to come

to some decision, but he had seen her assume so many attitudes that it was impossible for him to reach any definite conclusion. With the intonations of her voice still ringing in his ears, he mentally recalled her gestures, the movements of her head and the play of her eyes. Through the darkness her beauty appeared more luminous. The impressions which she had created returned with fresher force, and disclosed graces of person and of mind which at first had passed unperceived. Gradually he fell into one of those vagabond meditations during which the most lucid thoughts struggle and break against each other and affect the mind with a momentary delirium. One must be young to reveal and understand the secrets of dithyrambs like these, in which the heart, attacked by the soundest and most fantastic thoughts, yields to the last that strikes, to hope or to despair according to the will of an unknown power. At the age of twenty-three a man is almost always ruled by a sentiment of modesty, he is agitated by girlish timidities, he is afraid that he will not be able to express his love in the way he would like, he sees only the difficulties, he is almost sure that he will not please, he

would be bolder were he not so much in love, and the greater his love the less he thinks it will be returned. Then, too, he gives himself up in imagination so entirely to his happiness that he fears he is unable to offer any in exchange. If his idol should chance to be imposing, his worship is dumb and hidden; if his love is not divined, it dies. Not infrequently a precocious passion such as this, when buried in a young heart, rests there robed in brilliant illusions. Every man has some of these virgin memories which with time reawake more alluring than before, bringing with them the image of unalloyed happiness,—memories that are like children that have died, and of whom their parents remember nothing but their smiles.

M. de Nueil returned home a prey to extreme resolutions. Mme. de Beauséant had already become to him a necessary condition of existence. He preferred death to life without her. Still sufficiently youthful to be affected by the fascinations which the perfect woman exerts over unworn and passionate natures, he passed one of those nights during which young men oscillate between happiness and suicide, and after

which the greatest misfortune is to awake resigned. Too sincerely in love to be able to sleep, M. de Nueil devoted the early hours to the writing of letters. None of them satisfied him, and he burned them all.

The next day, — or rather the next evening, for he was afraid the viscountess would see him, — he took a turn or two about Courcelles. The sentiment to which he was then obedient belonged to a category so mysterious that one must needs be young or in a similar situation to understand its joys and vagaries, none of which, it may be noted, are ever appreciated by those people who are so happily constituted that they see in life nothing but the positive.

After many hesitations, Gaston at last succeeded in writing the following letter, which may stand as a model of the phraseology affected by those in love and may at the same time be compared to the sketches which children make for their parents, — presents admittedly detestable to every one except to those who receive them : —

“MADAM, — The influence which you exercise over me both in mind and body is so great that to-day my destiny depends entirely upon you. Do not throw my letter

into the fire. Do me at least the favor to read it. Perhaps you will forgive what I have written, when you notice that it is a declaration which is neither commonplace nor interested, but simply the expression of a fact. Perhaps, too, you may be touched by the modesty of my aspirations, by the resignation which has come of the knowledge of my inferiority, and by the effect which your determination will have on my life. I am irresistibly attracted to you by the pleasure which you give me, and I think of you with all of that egotism which draws us there, where, for us, is the vital spark. I do not think myself worthy of you. It is impossible for one young, ignorant and timid as am I, to bring to you the thousandth part of the happiness which I inhale in seeing you and hearing your voice. To me you are the one woman in the world. As I cannot endure life without you, I have decided to leave France and hazard my existence in some impossible enterprise in Africa or the East, — for to combat a limitless love do I not need the infinite? But if you will give me the hope, not that you will be mine, but that you will give me your friendship, I will not go. Permit me, once

in a while, to pass with you a few hours like those which I obtained by a trick. This slight happiness (whose delights you may curtail and entirely prohibit at the first word that offends you) shall be sufficient for me. Do I presume too much on your generosity in asking you to enter into a relationship of this kind, in which the profits will be mine alone? You can readily show the world, to which you sacrifice so much, that I am nothing to you. You are clever, you are proud; what have you to fear? And now I would like to pour my whole soul out to you, so as to show that in making this request I have no ulterior motive. I would not have told you that my love was limitless, had I the hope of making you share the profundity of the sentiment. No: provided I may be with you, I will be what you wish me to be. If you refuse, — if you can refuse, — I will say nothing, I will go away. If, later, a woman other than yourself should enter my life, you will have been right, but if I die faithful to my love perhaps you will have some regrets. The hope of causing you a regret will soften my own sorrow: it will be my one revenge."

To thoroughly understand the tortures

which Gaston de Nueil underwent when he felt that his first *ultimatum* was in the hands of Mme. de Beauséant, it is necessary to be familiar with all the wonderful misfortunes of youth, and to have soared on each of the white-winged chimeras that offer themselves to lurid imaginations. In fancy he saw the viscountess, indifferent, and jesting at love like one who no longer believes in it. He wished he had his letter back: he thought it absurd. A thousand and one ideas came to him which were infinitely better and which seemed far more touching than the chill phrases that he had sent. They were damnable phrases, he told himself, — damnable, sophistical and pretentious, but happily they were badly punctuated and the letter was crossed.

He tried not to think, not to feel, but he both thought and felt, and he suffered besides. Had he been thirty he would have gotten drunk, but in his innocence he was unacquainted either with opium or the resources of extreme civilization. In Bayeux he had none of those good friends who know so well how to say: "Poete, non dolet!" while offering you a bottle of champagne or leading you off to an orgy that will lull the torments of uncertainty.

At last, however, Jacques brought him a letter sealed with the arms of Burgundy, written on vellum note paper and scented like a pretty woman.

At once he turned the key in the door, in order, undisturbed, to read and reread the letter.

It ran as follows : —

“You have punished me very severely, sir, both for the effort I made to take all the harshness from my refusal and for the charm which intelligence invariably exerts upon me. I had confidence in the nobility of youth and you have deceived me. Yet I spoke to you, if not plainly, — which would have been ridiculous, — at least frankly, and explained to you my situation in such wise that you might understand my indifference. The more I have been interested in you, the more you have made me suffer. I am naturally tender-hearted, but circumstances have made me cruel. Another woman would have burned your letter without reading it. I, I have read it, and I answer it. My arguments will prove to you that if I am not insensible to the sentiment I have involuntarily inspired, I am yet far from sharing it, and my conduct will be an even greater evi-

dence of my sincerity. Moreover, I wish to exercise the authority which you have given me over your life, and desire to exert it now in your own behalf.

“I shall soon be thirty years old, while you are barely twenty-two. You yourself do not know what your thoughts will be when you reach my age. The vows you make so readily to-day will seem very heavy to you then. I am willing to believe that to-day you would give me your whole life without a regret, and that you would even consent to die for an ephemeral pleasure ; but when you are thirty experience will have taught you the futility of sacrifices, and I would be deeply humiliated were I obliged to accept them. Some day, everything, even to Nature herself, will command you to leave me, and I have told you that I prefer death to desertion. Misfortune, as you see, has made me calculate. I argue, I am without passion. You force me to tell you that I do not, that I ought not, that I cannot, that I will not love you. I have long since passed that moment in the life of woman when she yields to the unreasoned dictates of her heart, and I can no longer be the one you seek. My consolations are those that come from God,

and not from man. Besides, I read too clearly by the light of a deceived affection to accept the friendship which you offer and demand. It is but an effect of instinct, and I forgive your childish *ruse* the more readily as I know you are not its accomplice. In the name of your transient love, for your own sake and for my peace of mind, I order you to remain in your country and not to hazard an honorable career for an illusion that will necessarily disappear. Later, when, in the accomplishment of your true destiny, you have developed the sentiments that manhood awaits, you will appreciate this answer, which you perhaps now think unkind. You will then be glad to meet an old woman whose friendship will be pleasant to you: she will not have been subjected to the vicissitudes of passion or the disenchantments of life; in short, refined ideas and religious thoughts will have kept her pure and unblemished. And now, farewell: obey me with the knowledge that your successes will bring pleasure to my solitude, and think of me as one thinks of the absent."

After reading the letter, Gaston de Nueil wrote these words: —

"MADAM, — If I ceased to love you and

accepted the chances of mediocrity that you offer, you must acknowledge that I would deserve my fate. No, I will not obey you, and I swear to be faithful to you unto death. Oh, take my life, unless it be that you fear to bring a remorse into your own."

When M. de Nueil's servant returned from Courcelles, his master said to him: "To whom did you give my letter?"

"To her ladyship herself, sir; she was in a carriage and" —

"Coming in town?"

"I do not think so, sir; the carriage had post-horses."

"She is going away, then?"

"Yes, sir."

Gaston at once prepared to follow her. Unaware that she was being accompanied, the viscountess led him as far as Geneva. Among the thousand subjects of reflection that beset him on the way, this one: Why did she go? — occupied him with peculiar insistence and served as a text for a multitude of suppositions, of which, however, he naturally chose the most flattering, to wit: If she is going to care for me, there can be no doubt that she prefers Switzerland, where no one knows us, to France, where

she would meet many people inclined to find fault.

There are men who are so passionate that they have no time to appreciate a woman's tact. Gaston was not one of them. But then there is nothing to prove that his supposition was correct.

The viscountess took a villa on the lake. When she was safely installed, Gaston presented himself one fine evening just after sunset. Jacques, a thoroughly aristocratic servant, was not at all surprised to see him, and announced him with the air of a valet accustomed to understand everything. On hearing the name and on seeing the young man, Mme. de Beauséant let the book she held fall from her. Her surprise gave Gaston an opportunity to approach, and murmur in a voice that seemed like music: "What a pleasure it was to sit behind the very horses that brought you here!"

To be obeyed in one's secret wishes! Where is the woman who is insensible to such flattery? An Italian, one of those divine creatures whose heart is the antithesis of the Parisians, — in a word, a woman who would be considered utterly immoral on this side of the Alps, said, after reading some

French novels, "I don't see why these poor lovers spend so much time in arranging a matter that might easily be settled in an afternoon." May not the writer take the hint? Neither the reader nor the subject would lose by it. There might be a few charming scenes to describe, the delays which Mme. de Beauséant exacted either that she might succumb with greater grace or else that she might prolong that power whose future diminution a woman instinctively divines; but these little protocols of the boudoir — less numerous than those of the London Conference — are too unimportant in a history of true love to be worth mentioning.

For three years Mme. de Beauséant and M. de Nueil lived in the villa on the lake. They lived alone, seeing no one, knowing no one, in fact happy as we all dream of being. The villa, which was circled by large, shaded balconies and furnished with white lounges, dumb carpets, and fresh hangings, was the perfection of a lovers' nest. From each window the lake looked different, afar were the mountains with their fantastic peaks robed in fugitive colors, above was a fair sky, while before them was a wide stretch of

changing and capricious blue. Nature had tried her best for them, and had succeeded.

But at last important matters necessitated M. de Nueil's return to France. His father and brother were dead, and, in consequence, he was obliged to leave Geneva. Mme. de Beauséant accompanied him, and purchased an estate near Manerville. Here they took up their residence. In return for complete liberty, M. de Nueil relinquished to his mother the income arising from the property he had inherited. Mme. de Beauséant's estate was near a small town, in one of the most charming situations that the valley of Ange offered. Between the world and themselves they there erected insurmountable barriers, and lived over again the happy days that they had passed in Switzerland. For nine whole years they enjoyed a happiness which it is needless to describe, particularly as the climax will probably disclose its delights to those able to appreciate the infinite variations of poetry and prayer.


Meanwhile Mme. de Beauséant's husband was enjoying the most perfect health. There is no such incentive to keep on living as the knowledge that our death will make others

happy. The continued existence of the Marquis de Beauséant (his father and brother had died) was therefore an obstacle to his wife's union with M. de Nueil. Consequently, after nine years of unalloyed happiness, the two lovers were in as false a position as that in which they found themselves at the beginning of their adventure. This was unfortunate; more so, in fact, than it is possible to explain with entire exactness, though its terms can be stated with mathematical precision.

The Comtesse de Nueil, Gaston's mother, had never consented to see Mme. de Beauséant. She was a strait-laced lady, who had never caused her husband the slightest uneasiness. Mme. de Beauséant therefore readily understood that this virtuous dowager was her enemy, and one who would try to drag Gaston out of the immoral and irreligious life that he was leading. The marchioness, it is true, might have sold her estate and gone back to Geneva. But such a proceeding would have argued a distrust of M. de Nueil, and of that she was incapable. Besides, he had taken a great fancy to Valleroy, and was much occupied in cultivating and improving it. Meanwhile, the

country had been invaded by a Demoiselle de La Rodière, a young lady who was twenty-two years old and rich to the extent of forty thousand francs per annum. Gaston met this heiress at Manerville every time it was his duty to go there. These people being thus placed like the figures in an equation, the following letter which Gaston received one morning will explain the hideous problem which, for the past month, Mme. de Beauséant had been trying to solve:—

“To write to you, dearest, when we live hand in hand, when nothing separates us, when our caresses are a language and our words caresses, will perhaps seem to you absurd. Yet that it is not. There are certain things that a woman cannot say in the presence of him whom she loves; the mere thought of them takes her voice from her and sends the blood to her heart. She is then weak and speechless. To feel in such a way when I am with you makes me suffer, and yet I suffer often. I feel that to you I should be truth itself, that I should conceal none of my thoughts, even the most fugitive. With you I should never have cause for preoccupation. I must therefore tell you



of my agony, for agony it is. Listen to me, and do not interrupt me with that impertinent 'There, there' of yours, which I love because I love everything you do. Listen to me, and first let me tell you that you have banished the sorrows beneath whose weight I was once about to succumb. With you alone have I known what love meant. It took the candor of your fair youth and the purity of your great nature to satisfy the exactions of an exacting woman. Often I have wept for joy in thinking that during nine long swift years my jealousy had not been once aroused. I have had every flower of your heart and every thought. My happiness has been unbounded. Our sky has been ever unclouded. We have never known what a sacrifice was ; we have always obeyed the dictates and the inspirations of united hearts.

"The tears that blot this page will tell my gratitude for me. And still this very happiness has initiated me to a torture far more terrible than that of desertion. Dear, a woman's heart has many a depth ; it was but to-day I saw the profundities of my own and learned the vastitude of love. The greatest misfortunes that can come to a wo-

man seem trifles when compared to the misery of the man she loves; and if she is the cause of his misery, is not the knowledge sufficient to kill her? It is this idea that is oppressing me, but with it comes another that is even worse, one that degrades love and makes of it a humiliation that tarnishes life forever. You are thirty years old and I am forty. The difference between our ages frightens me. The sacrifice that you made in renouncing the world for me must have weighed heavily on you. You have thought, perhaps, of your social destiny, of the marriage which would necessarily increase your fortune, which would give you an heir and enable you to return to the world and occupy the position which belongs to you. But these thoughts you have repressed. You have wished to remain faithful to the vows that bind us only in the sight of God. You have remembered my past unhappiness, and the knowledge of it has served as a protection to me; but to owe your love to pity! That thought is more horrible than the idea that I have interfered with your career. They who stab their mistresses are charitable indeed when they kill them, happy, innocent, and in the glory of

their illusions. Yes, death is preferable to the train of thought that for some days past has been secretly saddening my life.

“When you asked me yesterday what the matter was, your sweet voice made me shudder: I fancied you had read my thoughts, as you have often done before, and I awaited your confidences, expecting to find my presentiments justified and to learn that you had been thinking of your future. I remembered then certain little attentions which you have always paid me, but in which of late there has seemed to be something of that affectation by which men betray their weariness. At that moment I felt that my happiness had cost me dear, for in your eyes I read these words: ‘Sooner or later I shall have to abandon Claire; why not at once?’ I left you to hide my tears, the first I have hidden from you, the first real ones that have come to me in ten years. And yet I did not accuse you. Yes, you are right. It would be wrong of me to seek to burden an existence which without me would be useful and brilliant. . . . But if I am mistaken, if your mood was one of melancholy and not of boredom, tell me, tell me so; do not leave me in this uncer-

tainty ; punish me if you will, but let me feel that your love is unchanged. Since your mother came, since you met Mlle. de La Rodière, I am a prey to doubts that dishonor us. Make me suffer then if need be, but do not deceive me. I must know all ; what your mother thinks and what you think yourself. If you have hesitated, I give you back your freedom. I will hide my grief from you, I will not even weep before you, but I will never see you again. Oh, I must stop, my heart is breaking. . . . For the last few moments I have been stupefied with grief, but now it is over. I have no feeling against you. You are kind, you are upright, you would neither wound nor deceive me, I am sure, and I know that you will tell me the truth, however cruel the truth may be. Do you want me to encourage you to make your confession ? Well then, sweetheart, I shall be consoled with a woman's thought. I know that you will never love any one as you have loved me. Your youth has been mine. No one can take it from me. I can have no rival. My *souvenirs* will be unembittered. But now that you are a man you will calculate. You will have preoccupations and annoyances

and ambitions that will deprive *her* of that constant smile which your lips have always had for me. Your voice, which to me has been ever soft, will at times be stern. Then, as it is impossible for any one to love you as I do, you will never care for *her* as you have cared for me. She will be incapable of that continual study that I have made of your happiness. The man, the heart, the mind that I have known, will exist no longer. I will bury them in my memory to delight in them still, and live over again that fair past which is unknown to every one save ourselves.

“And now, if it is possible that you have not had the slightest thought of freedom, if my love is not a burden, if my fears are chimerical, if I am always your Eve, the only woman in the world, then, when you have read this letter, come, fly to me. In one instant I will love you, I think, more than I have done in these nine years. After having endured these useless tortures, each day added to our love — aye, a single day — will be a life of happiness. Speak, therefore; be frank; to deceive me would be a crime. Speak; do you wish your freedom? Have you thought about the future? Have you

a regret? I? I cause you a regret? I would die first. As I have told you, my love is so great that I prefer your happiness to my own, your life to mine. Put aside, if you can, the memory of nine years of happiness, that they may not influence your decision, but speak. I will be as submissive to you as to God, — to the one consoler I shall have if you forsake me.”

When Mme. de Beauséant knew that her letter had been delivered, she sank into a despondent meditation. Assuredly she suffered pangs whose intensity is not always proportioned to woman's strength, and yet which women alone endure. While she awaited her fate, M. de Nueil found himself extremely embarrassed. He had almost yielded to his mother's instigations and to the attractions of Mlle. de La Rodière, an insignificant little thing with hardly a word to say for herself, but whose forty thousand a year spoke for her.

Mme. de Nueil, seconded by her motherly affection, was doing her best to lead her son to virtue. She pointed out how flattering it was for him to be preferred by a young lady who had numberless good offers; she told him it was high time he thought of set-

ting down, and that the opportunity he then had to do so might never occur again. Some day or other he would have eighty thousand francs a year, and wealth was an immense consolation. If Mme. de Beauséant loved him for himself, she ought to be the first to recommend the marriage. In a word, the good lady left no stone unturned in her effort to influence his decision. As it was, she had made him hesitate. Mme. de Beauséant's letter found him struggling with the seductions of an ordered and proper life. But the letter decided the combat. He determined to leave the marchioness and get married.

"I must show myself a man," he said.

But at once he foresaw the misery that his resolution would cause. His vanity, his tenderness even, increased its proportions. He felt sincerely compassionate. The blow seemed so abrupt that he thought it both necessary and charitable to lessen its severity. Could he but tranquilize Mme. de Beauséant, he thought that by accustoming her to the idea of a necessary separation, by bringing Mlle. de La Rodière, like a phantom, between them, and by appearing to sacrifice the young lady at first in order to have

her forced upon him later, that little by little she herself would insist upon the marriage. He even went so far as to count upon her pride, and the nobility of her nature. To lull her suspicions he determined to answer her letter.

But to a woman whose intuition went hand in hand with the most delicate perceptions, a letter was little else than a decree. Therefore, when Jacques brought her a note folded in the shape of a triangle, the poor woman trembled like a bird caught in a trap. A chill descended into her being, and enveloped her with a shroud of ice. If he did not throw himself weeping at her feet, all was at an end. And yet in the heart of a woman that loves there is such a wealth of hope! It takes many a dagger-thrust to kill them; they love and bleed to the very last.

"Does madam wish anything?" Jacques asked softly as he withdrew.

"No," she answered. "Poor fellow," she thought as she brushed away a tear, "he understands; he, a servant!"

She read: "*MY DEAR ONE*, — You have been indulging your fancy" — On seeing these words her sight became as though veiled

by a mist. A secret voice cried to her : " He lies." Then, glancing down and over the first page with that lucid avidity which passion communicates, she read at the bottom : " Nothing is decided." Turning the page with convulsive vivacity, in an instant she understood the spirit that had dictated the labored phrases which followed, phrases in which there was no trace nor sign of the impetuosity of love ; and rumpling the letter she tore it, rolled it, bit it, threw it into the fire and cried aloud : " The coward ! he embraced me when he no longer loved me ! " Then, half dead, she flung herself on a lounge.

M. de Nueil, after writing the letter, went out. When he returned Jacques met him at the door. " Here is a letter, sir," he said ; " her ladyship has left the Château."

Somewhat astonished, M. de Nueil broke the seal, and read : —

" MADAM, — If I ceased to love you, and accepted the chances of mediocrity that you offer, you must acknowledge that I would deserve my fate. No, I will not obey you, and I swear to be faithful to you unto death. Oh, take my life, unless it be that you fear to bring a remorse into your own."

It was the letter which he had sent to Mme. de Beauséant when she was setting out for Geneva. Across it Clara of Burgundy had written : "Sir, you are free."

M. de Nueil went to Manerville, where his mother was. Twenty days later he married Mlle. Stéphanie de La Rodière.

If this story were to end here, the reader might complain that he had been cheated. But the recital of the climax, which, unfortunately, is true, joined to the memories of those who have loved and lost, may perhaps serve to shield it from criticism.

After her rupture with M. de Nueil, Mme. de Beauséant continued to live in the Château of Valleroy. From a multitude of reasons which are best left buried in her heart, but of which the reader may choose any one he prefers, she elected to remain there after M. de Nueil's marriage. Such was her seclusion that, save Jacques and her maid, none of her servants ever saw her. She exacted a silence that was absolute, and went out, if at all, only to the chapel, where a priest held mass for her.

A few days after his marriage, M. de Nueil fell into a sort of conjugal apathy which was as indicative of contentment as of dissatisfaction.

His mother said to every one: "My son is perfectly happy."

Mme. Gaston de Nueil, like a good many other young women, was a trifle dull, but sweet and patient. Her husband was very kind to her, yet a month or two after leaving the marchioness he became dreamy and thoughtful. He had always been that way, his mother said.

After seven months of lukewarm delight there occurred certain incidents which, while apparently unimportant, were yet evidences of such developments of thought that they may be merely mentioned and left to the interpretations which different readers may care to give to them.

One day, when M. de Nueil had been out hunting, he came back by way of Valleroy, sent for Jacques, and when he came, asked: "Is the marchioness still fond of game?"

On Jacques' affirmative answer, Gaston offered him a handsome sum of money and several special arguments, for the purpose of obtaining from him the easy service of reserving for the marchioness any game that he (Gaston) might bring. It seemed to Jacques to be a very unimportant matter whether the partridge which his mistress ate

was killed by her keeper or by M. de Nueil, especially as the latter did not wish her to know by whom it was shot, and for several days he willingly assisted in the innocent deceit. M. de Nueil started out with his gun every morning, and only returned in time for dinner, with an empty bag.

In this way a week passed. Gaston grew bold enough to write a long letter to the marchioness, which he caused to be delivered to her. It was returned unopened. When the letter was brought back to him it was nearly night. Suddenly the count rushed out of the room where he had appeared to be listening to a caprice of Hérold's that his wife was murdering on the piano, and ran to Valleroy with the rapidity of a man who is flying to a rendezvous. He entered the park, walked slowly through the alleys, stopping now and then as though he were trying to hush the beatings of his heart; then, having reached the château, he listened to the sounds and felt sure that the servants were all at table. He entered, and went directly to Mme. de Beauséant's apartment. The marchioness never left her bedroom, and he was able to reach the door without having been heard. There, by the light of

two candles, he saw the marchioness, thin and pale, sitting in a great chair, her head bowed, her hands drooping, and her eyes lost in contemplation. It was grief in its most complete expression. In her attitude there was a suggestion of some vague hope, but who shall say whether Clara of Burgundy was looking into the past or toward the tomb? It may be that M. de Nueil's tears glistened in the shadows, it may be that his breath came quicker, it may be that involuntarily he trembled, or perhaps his presence was impossible without the phenomenon of intersusception which is at once the glory, the charm and the proof of true love. At any rate, Mme. de Beauséant slowly turned her head to the door and saw her former lover. The count then advanced a step or two.

"If you approach me, sir," the marchioness cried, "I will throw myself from that window." She turned, caught the sash, opened it, and — with a foot on the sill, a hand on the casement, and her head turned to Gaston — "Leave me," she cried, "or I will throw myself out."

At this terrible threat, M. de Nueil, hearing the servants' voices, ran off like a thief in the night.

On his return home he wrote a short note, which he gave to his valet, telling him to take it to Mme. de Beauséant, and enjoining him to let the marchioness understand that it concerned a matter of life and death. When the messenger had gone, M. de Nueil reëntered the sitting-room where his wife was still torturing the caprice. He sat down to await the answer. An hour later, the caprice being done for, husband and wife were sitting on either side of the fireplace, when the valet returned, and handed his master his unopened letter. M. de Nueil went into the next room, where he had left his gun, and shot himself.

This suicide will be thoroughly understood by any one who has observed or experienced the phenomena created by the perfect union of two people. A woman does not love in a day. Her affection is a flower which needs the most ingenious culture; its resources and delicate pleasures come only with time and harmony of disposition. The belief, the certainty of experiencing an excess of happiness with the one beloved is a part of the secret of lasting attachments. With a woman who possesses the genius of her sex, love never degenerates into the com-

monplace. She can garment it with forms so varied, she is at once so attractive and so affectionate, she heightens nature with so many artifices, or rather her artifices are so natural, that she is as powerful in memory as she is by her actual presence. Beside her all other women are insignificant. To value her love as it should be valued, one must have feared to lose it or really have done so. But if, having known it, a man has given it up for some mistaken marriage; if the woman with whom he hoped to find his happiness repeated proves to him by some one or another of those acts which are buried in the shadows of conjugal life that that happiness is not to be his again; if his lips still hold the savor of a celestial love, and if, for the sake of a social chimera, he has mortally wounded her who is after all his true wife, — then he has either to blow his brains out or else practice that chill and egotist philosophy which is a horror to passionate natures.

As to Mme. de Beauséant, it is probable that she did not think her friend's despair would extend as far as suicide, especially after he had been steeped in love for nine years. Perhaps she thought that she would be the only one to suffer. But however

this may be, she was right in refusing to receive him again on his former footing, for it was in the purity of her love that she found her justification.

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